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JOHN AND SARAH  
DUKE AND DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH



*John, Duke of Marlborough 16  
from a picture by Kneller*





JOHN AND SARAH  
DUKE AND DUCHESS OF  
MARLBOROUGH

1660—1744

BASED ON UNPUBLISHED LETTERS AND  
DOCUMENTS AT BLENHEIM PALACE

BY STUART J. REID, D.C.L.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY THE  
DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH, K.G.

WITH PORTRAITS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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## PREFACE

A PREFACE to a book ought to prove, to some extent at least, an aid to its interpretation. I sometimes think that an author when called upon to make such a deliverance may be likened to an architect who, in the presence of his completed work, is asked to explain the methods of its construction. Author and architect might very well claim to be excused, for books, like buildings, are, after all, accomplished facts which speak for themselves, and if their appeal is not self-evident, it is negligible. People who do not care for a preface—they are in a minority I am told—are quite at liberty to exercise the right of private judgment, and pass over these pages in their haste to read the Introduction with which the Duke of Marlborough has equipped this work. But since the majority of readers appreciate an author's confidences and prefer him to talk to them before the curtain is drawn up, I make a virtue of necessity and take up my parable. This is an age when the will of the majority, for better or worse, prevails, and therefore I propose to make a statement—inevitably personal in part—which is intended to be an aid to the interpretation of the book. There is a certain advantage, moreover, about a preface, since it gives the author an opportunity of telling the reader certain facts which could not be introduced into the actual text without doing violence to a narrative which is at once biographical and historical. I am



a firm believer in the old idea that the perfection of art consists in its concealment, and though I do not flatter myself I have attained to it, I can at least claim that I have kept myself out of sight in this work, except in a few pages in the final chapter, when a personal statement about the Blenheim Archives was imperative.

At the outset it is necessary to explain how I came to be entrusted with so important a task as the vindication of John Duke and Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, by an appeal to historical documents and letters which have long lurked in ambush. My association with Blenheim is not of yesterday. It began as far back as the summer of 1889, and has continued more or less to the present time. In the spring of the year I have just named, one night when I was the guest of my friend, the late Colonel Harcourt of Nuneham Park, he made a quite unexpected proposal to me. Colonel Harcourt had read my then recently published biography of Sydney Smith. He was old enough to have known personally the inimitable and witty Canon to whom he thought I had done tardy justice, and from that day onwards to his death he honoured me with his confidence. I dwell on this in passing because it links my first book to my last. That night, in the spring of 1889, Colonel Harcourt told me that he had just been consulted by the then Duke of Marlborough in regard to the arrangement of the Blenheim Archives, which at that time were in hopeless confusion. He asked me if I was prepared to attempt the task of bringing order out of chaos. In those days I was young and ardent, and had my way to make, and in that way began confidential relations with the ducal family of Marlborough, which have remained unbroken for more than a quarter of a century.

Blenheim, when I first crossed its stately portals

was difficult of approach. Handborough was the nearest railway station, for the branch-line to Woodstock, which makes the journey easy to-day, was not then constructed. Probably if I had known all the difficulties of my task I should not have undertaken it. Those difficulties were enhanced when the Duke, as my work was approaching completion, suddenly discovered in some roomy and forgotten cupboard in the palace many bundles of fresh papers, which threw my previous classification into disorder. But to cut the story short, with the occasional help of two assistants—one of whom was the late Dr. Burch, F.R.S., of Oxford, and the other my old college friend Mr. Henry Johnson—I succeeded in arranging the papers to the late Duke of Marlborough's satisfaction. My relations with Blenheim grew more intimate when the present Duke succeeded to the title. His Grace requested me to make a collection of historical books, designed to take the place of the vanished Sunderland Library. I also, on the Duke's initiative and as the result of researches at home and abroad, identified a number of flags captured by John Duke in battle, which were reproduced in facsimile, and hang in Blenheim to-day in all the bravery of gold and silver embroidery. Finally, the Duke did me the honour to ask me to write a biography of the imperious Sarah, and this book—expanded on second thoughts to cover also the career of John Duke in the years of his unequalled military ascendancy—is the outcome.

There is next to nothing at Blenheim beyond a few parchments and official papers concerning the early career of Marlborough, and therefore I have passed lightly over his services prior to the years in which he won his abiding heritage of renown. It was when Anne came to the throne, and England was confronted with the War of the Spanish Succession,

that the Duke in the camp and the Duchess at the Court rose to a supremacy which was unmatched in the annals of the nation by any other man and woman who stood in the relation of husband and wife. Lord Bryce, when I began this book, said to me, "Give us plenty of letters," and all the way through I have carried that counsel of perfection in my mind. Contemporary letters, written with no view of publication, are like unsuspected doors which, when opened, throw new light on the page of history. I make no apology, therefore, for a constant appeal to them. At the same time, in many instances it has only been possible to print citations from the Blenheim Papers. Two hundred years ago brevity had not been accepted as the soul of wit. People of rank and leisure spent hours over a single letter, and filled pages of it with sentimental reflections, elaborate compliments, or what Sarah Duchess used to call, with dry humour, "protestations." If I had quoted many of the letters as they stand, I should have thrown my picture out of scale, and might even have required a second volume to make room for what, at this time of day, is of no permanent value. Faded and discursive rambling letters, written often in involved phraseology with quill-pens that never seemed to tire, blotted with mica dust, and sealed with wax, had often of necessity to be curtailed.

Archdeacon Coxe, in the well-known "Life of John Duke of Marlborough," which was published nearly a century ago, and is often quoted in these pages, took up a distant and somewhat critical attitude in regard to the Duchess. I am inclined to think that that worthy cleric did not in the least approve of her. She seems to have been, in his eyes, a sort of marplot of unbridled speech—the kind of person to be dismissed by a scholar with a shudder. He never took the pains, I imagine, to understand

her. Marlborough was the hero of Archdeacon Coxe; the Duchess, though he could not by any means ignore her, was a *femme incomprise* with a temper which, in the end, helped to wreck the great soldier's career. I do not think he took the trouble to examine with any degree of thoroughness the impetuous scrawls of the Duchess, except in regard to the historic quarrel between Queen Anne and the most unconventional Mistress of the Robes that was ever in authority at the English Court. Many of them, especially those written in later life, appear altogether to have escaped him, or this book would not contain so much that is new. Lord Wolseley, though he did not profess to have studied closely the character of the indomitable Duchess, described her in conversation with me as a "torpedo in petticoats." But the Duchess cannot be dismissed in a phrase, however witty, or this book would never have been written. She was not merely a warm-hearted and impulsive, but also a remarkable woman, who played a great part in the reign of Anne, and the truth about her cannot be coined in an epigram, whether of censure or of praise. The Duke of Marlborough, in his Introduction, has spoken of Sarah as a great woman of business, and the Blenheim Archives prove that point up to the hilt. There are innumerable documents in the Duke's possession which show that the Duchess, in the more than twenty years of her widowhood, was alert, sagacious, and practical to the last degree. If I have not burdened my pages with many instances of this, the reason is that it would have carried me too far into prosaic details.

I plead guilty to divided allegiance. It may be ungallant to make such a confession, but the Duke rather than the Duchess appears to me both in character and in achievement to be the more compelling personage. Here the old saying, "Words are

women; deeds are men," suggests itself. The Duke was supremely a man of action—invincible amid a shower of bullets, but irresolute amid a shower of pamphlets. He thought that his achievements spoke for themselves, and stood aloof from verbal contests with a crowd of scribblers who did their best to make havoc of his reputation. The Duchess ran to the opposite extreme. "Words are women." Her pen was seldom at rest. The joy of battle to her was to repel with heat accusations which were so trivial, as well as groundless, that they would have been forgotten in her lifetime if she had been endowed with her husband's coolness and self-restraint. As it was, they both suffered, the Duke from silence, the Duchess from speech, and slander in consequence went its way, until it was accepted by historians, some of whom tricked it out with rhetoric in order to prick the bubble reputation. It was the conviction that the motives and actions of the first Duke and Duchess of Marlborough had been traduced which led me—with what success others must judge—to tell the story of their lives in the light of authentic letters which have been hidden away for several generations. The more I studied the career of the Duchess, the more I realized that it was impossible to do justice to the story without bringing into full view her illustrious husband in the years when he was winning the historic battles of the War of the Spanish Succession. Hence it came about, in Mr. Murray's happy phrase, that the "river overflowed its banks," and I found myself compelled—as the fortunes of the Duke and Duchess were indissolubly linked—to describe in the light of the Blenheim Archives the part which they both played in the short but dramatic reign of Queen Anne.

It only remains for me to add that my book has, in manuscript, been subjected to a running fire of

criticism, and I am free to admit that, though its faults may still be many, it has been improved in the process. Perhaps at this stage I ought to acknowledge my indebtedness to Lady Burghclere, the Duke of Marlborough, Mr. Harold Temperley (Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge), Dr. Stopford Brooke, and Mr. John Murray, who have all read the manuscript, and given me more or less important suggestions. One other allusion in this regard I must permit myself. But for the constant and practical sympathy of my wife, I should have faltered and perhaps have failed in my task. I am especially indebted to Mr. Temperley and Mr. Murray for critical comment, which has, to a marked degree, enabled me to steer clear of historical pitfalls. I do not for a moment suppose that in this respect I have entirely succeeded, but the book as it stands would not have been quite as impeccable but for their help. I might say a good deal more, but it is time to bow myself off the scene, and so I will only add in this connection, *habent sua fata libelli*. As for the rest, to borrow the historic words of the Abbé Vertot when he finished his History of the Knights of Malta, "Mon siège est fait." With that I leave my book, such as it is, to take its chance for better or worse in the world of letters.

STUART REID.

BLACKWELL CLIFF,  
EAST GRINSTEAD,  
SUSSEX.

May 7, 1914.



## INTRODUCTION

By THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH, K.G.

A DILETTANTE mind like mine, which passes from history as treated logically by Stubbs to history as treated adventurously by Froude, is rather at a loss to describe the historian's true position. I suppose that he feels himself free to take ground as he chooses between romance and science; and perhaps it is for this reason that history requires to be rewritten to suit each successive epoch of thought. Should the history of England, as set forth in the textbooks, be judged to lag somewhat behind contemporary ideas, that is due to the fascination exercised over men's minds by Macaulay. If an historian's greatness is to be measured by his influence, Macaulay is great indeed. It is from his "History of England" that the average man, even if he has never read the book, derives his notions about the phase of our constitutional history which opened in 1688, and is not yet closed, though it is closing. Nor is this influence surprising. To his historical studies Macaulay brought supreme literary power, and a complete sympathy with the dominant political ideas of his time. His "History of England" is the great monument of Whiggery. It exhibits, and was intended to exhibit, the constitutional development of England, from the Revolution to the Reform Bill, as an almost providentially beneficent scheme of ordered progress.

Indeed, it is hardly straining the truth to say that, in dealing with the outstanding figures of the revolu-



tionary period, Macaulay asked himself what attitude they would have adopted to the franchise question, say in 1830, and judged them accordingly. Did their work further the coming of Reform, then they are children of light. Did it retard it, then Macaulay does not hesitate to use his genius to awaken prejudice against them. Of Marlborough's hostility to what Macaulay regarded as the true constitutional movement the historian entertained no doubt; and when I come to discuss Marlborough's political opinions, I shall try to show that Macaulay's antipathy was well founded. But the great Whig's judgment was too keen to dismiss Marlborough as an ordinary foe. In him he saw the one man who might have arrested, perhaps have changed, the whole current of English political development; and against him he directed all his arts. His success has been amazing. The "History" ends at the point where Marlborough's supreme achievements begin, but the estimate of character based on this incomplete record holds the field. To the average Englishman Marlborough is a soldier of eminence, but he is by no means a national hero. The evil which he did, or which Macaulay said he did, in the earlier part of his career, has been allowed to eclipse the splendour of his victories.

No complete vindication of Marlborough has hitherto been attempted, and it seems to me that the thought of our time demands some such enterprise in the interests of English History. To what extent this volume succeeds in supplying such a vindication, time and public opinion alone can decide. Indeed, modern political thought is so conspicuously fluid that it is as yet hardly possible to determine the quality of its historical judgments. But it can at least be laid down that the principles of English classical Liberalism are no longer accepted as possessing the universal soundness claimed for them by their earlier

advocates. It is no longer true to say that government by a Ministry responsible to a representative Legislature is the last word in political wisdom. No one who considers the preponderant place occupied by Germany in the modern world can maintain that Parliamentary institutions afford the only avenue to national greatness. We are, in fact, reopening questions which Macaulay regarded as settled for ever, and we are necessarily revising many of Macaulay's opinions. In particular, it is now possible to give more sympathetic consideration to the political ideas of the man who was the villain of Macaulay's piece.

Moreover, our general outlook has shifted in two important respects. Political economy has definitely displaced religion as the mainspring of political action, and we have consequently lost not a little of our old enthusiasm for Whiggish hatred of the Stuarts. Marlborough never ceased to love the Stuarts, not even when, at the supreme crisis of his life, he preferred his religion to his King; and Macaulay was not the man to understand, still less to condone, his hesitation. Greater justice can be done him now. Cosmopolitanism is the second of the Whig doctrines that have sunk in repute. Extended facilities for foreign travel have brought a more acute sense of national distinctions; and a conviction that foreigners and Englishmen do not think alike probably sums up the average insular notion of foreign policy. Macaulay made a hero of William III., because he found in him the pivot of a European combination. Our own more quizzical, more practical-minded age thinks rather of the national unit, and is better able to sympathize with Marlborough's passionate service of England and the English Crown.

Above all, Macaulay's attitude was dramatic. It is true that he compromised with the scientific spirit of his time by representing the figures of his history,

not as free agents, but as protagonists of causes; but within this limitation he gave the rein to his dramatic instinct. His personages stand for ideas greater than themselves, but it is in the actions of personages that the progress of ideas is indicated. Accordingly he sets forth his theories by drawing a sharp contrast between Marlborough and William III.; and to do this he has to misinterpret motives, and even to distort facts. For Marlborough was something more than a foil to William. In the field he was his superior, in diplomacy he was his equal; and when Macaulay exhibits him as a mere background to throw up the King's qualities he does him an injustice, a vague consciousness of which perhaps explains his bitterness.

Nowadays we have read too many novels to demand a dramatic presentation of history. We are not concerned exclusively with character as presented in action; we enjoy the study of character for its own sake. Our temper is analytical rather than constructive, psychological rather than dramatic. Motive, and the whole complex thought-process that determines motive, strike us as worthy of examination; and we are not the less interested in Marlborough's general ideas because they bore no fruit. It is with an eye to this modern psychological interest that this book has been written. Its business is to set out what manner of man Marlborough was, rather than to pass a verdict on what he did. For this reason its main concern is with his intimate personal feelings, with his revelation of himself in his relations with his wife, and not with the cold front he put on to the world. But it does not commit the mistake of making the Duchess a foil to the Duke, as Macaulay made the Duke a foil to the King. By a happy coincidence Marlborough reveals himself most fully in his attitude to the most remarkable woman of his time, and one of the most remarkable women of any time. The

Duchess deserves study on the score of her own merits, and she, too, is most intimately known through her private life. Only Sarah Jennings could command the confidence of John Churchill; only John Churchill could command the confidence of Sarah Jennings; and Providence made them husband and wife. That confidence was never broken, was never even threatened, throughout the whole of their married life; and its memory was the one joy of her long widowhood. The relations of these two exceptional people, and the light thrown by their relations upon the character of each, provide the material for the fascinating piece of psychological history that is told in this book.

What was the secret of the hold which each possessed over the other? It may be sought in the quotations given in these pages from the two little packets of letters—his to her and hers to him—the former of which the Duchess read over in her extreme old age, and wrote on the docket that she wished to destroy them, but had not the heart. If so, the secret will be sought in vain. These notes scarcely seem the foundation for a life-long affection. On John Churchill's side they show a most moving and romantic passion. But does romance withstand the commonplace little strains of married life? Too often it wears itself away and leaves disillusion. Of John Churchill we can only say that in this, as in other respects, his character was exceptional. He was a true romantic; and, as I shall try to show later, his temperament coloured all his thought. But here it is enough to point out that his romance lasted as long as his life, and was even unaffected by the pitiful quarrels between his wife and his children. To all others who had dealings with her the Duchess was a most efficient woman of the world; but to her husband she was a radiant and wonderful being, whom he was reluctant to place in this world at all. How un-

willingly he writes her a few words of caution and criticism at a time when her breach with the Queen was making it impossible for him to realize the aspiration of his life !

Romantic though he may have been, Marlborough did not generally allow the strength of his feelings to overpower the firmness of his judgment ; and again we must ask how his wife, and his wife alone, succeeded in breaking down all barriers. Her own letters in this bundle fail to answer the question. It would be doing a grave injustice to a woman who, above all things, always knew her own mind, to suggest that she hesitated over the choice of a husband ; but her letters do not indicate any decision. She is sure of her man, and is prepared to play with him. She takes a certain enjoyment in provoking him to new outbursts. She is very determined that she shall not be lightly won. She was not what is called a man's woman, and she chose to show him the side of her character that would have repelled anyone else. The world thought her all brain, so she put all her brain into these letters. When he offered her romance, she replied by playing a game of skill.

It was what he wanted. Marlborough did not possess and scarcely appreciated the intellectual excellencies. Political life, with its eternal intrigues, never appealed to him—not, perhaps, so much because he found it petty as because he found it cold. His nature delighted only in broad issues whose decision could stir the soul. But he knew the incompleteness of his character ; and though he was unmoved by the contemplation of his missing qualities in a man, he idolized them in a woman. It was his wont to worship things ; he worshipped intellect in his wife. Hers was a very capable, matter-of-fact intellect, of the order that the French recognize in the women they call *maîtresses femmes*. Her concern was not with ideas,

but with situations; and her masculine qualities made her the dearer in his eyes because they were the complement of his own nature. It would be too much to say that he married her for her brains or for her charm; the truth is that he married her because he could not help himself. But he exalted her for her brains; because of them he placed her even above his Queen. He was proud of his wife because she could deal on equal terms with the best statesmen of his time. Excellence in anything appealed to him because he excelled himself; and it seemed to him only fitting that the supreme intellect of the day should be his wife's, and thus, as it were, a part of his own being. He was not ambitious for his own sake, except, perhaps, in his first youth; but honours had an attraction for him, since he knew that she would use them in a way the world would admire. In a word, her brains inspired his confidence, and her womanhood his passion; and it was her unique combination of intellect with sex which perpetually fed the fire of his romance.

So, perhaps, half of the secret may be extracted from these letters—his half. But what of hers? Even at this time she strongly objected to her letters being kept, and her feelings towards her future husband have to be inferred from ten meagre notes. But we may fairly consider these as typical; and, if we judge her by them, we might sum her up as having nothing more than a keen intellectual relish for the homage of a man whom she perceived to stand apart from his fellows. It is true that in the days of her greatness she was notoriously insusceptible to flattery; it took many years before even the unstinted affection of a Queen weakened her luminous perception of facts. But it is tempting to say that she was only a woman after all, with a woman's love of admiration, which she was not ashamed to indulge when her

admirer was a man of genius. Possibly some such reflections may have influenced her in early days, but it is not thus that her character should be read. The truth which is hidden in her letters is revealed in the pathetic docket that I have quoted. It was no last impulse of a coquettish love of admiration that made her read over in her lonely old age these notes of more than half a century before. She had not the vanity that would demand such morbid gratification. Least of all could pride in her past have moved her to burn the letters and then refrain from lack of courage. The truth is that she gave herself to her husband as completely as he gave himself to her, and for the same reason—she found in him the complement of her own nature.

There was little that such a woman as Sarah Jennings could find to lean upon, even among the commanding men of her epoch. She had herself all the qualities of a successful man. She might perhaps have taken a certain masculine delight in making a career for a husband markedly her inferior, but she was too intolerant of incompetence for that delight to have persisted for long. And so she sought for a man who had what she lacked. She might have found a mystic, would have found him, maybe, had she lived a generation earlier. But a mystic would have been a strange figure at Charles II.'s showy Court. Instead she found a man of genius. Her husband fascinated her because she never quite penetrated his character. She could have learned the rules of generalship, just as she mastered all the political arts, but she could never have acquired Marlborough's secret of unfailing victory. That came of genius which she lacked, and was great enough to know that she lacked. When Marlborough was planning a battle, he became the most secretive of men. His wife, who would have stormed with rage

had he failed to take her counsel in any affair of practical life, not only bore his secrecy, but enjoyed it. It was because he could do what nobody else could do, and that without breathing a word of it beforehand even to her, that she acknowledged him her master.

Before their marriage—perhaps even after it—it was her cue to twit John Churchill for his love of romance. That was characteristic; she was a woman with a proper contempt for dreamers. Yet she came to idolize a romantic because she discerned in the young Churchill that quality, hidden from the world until long afterwards, which places him among the great romantics who have changed the course of human destinies. He had the power of making dreams come true. Any lover can tell his lady of the magnificent things he would do for her sake; Marlborough did them. He laid his victories like roses at his wife's feet. For her he dreamed, and then, grappling patiently with reluctant facts, turned his dreams into achievements. It was to her he sent the most splendid love-token that ever man gave to woman, the news of Blenheim—to her, and not to the Queen. He followed up his first despatch with a letter explaining the meaning of his act, though we may be sure that she had guessed it at once.

"I can't end my letter," he wrote, "without being soe vain as to tell my dearest soull that within the memory of man there has been noe Victory soe great as this, and as I am sure you love me soe intirely well, that you will be infinitely pleas'd with what has been done."

The same spirit is shown in the letter sent off just after Malplaquet had been fought and won. He had written to her on the night before the battle—a long letter in a firm hand. To it he added next day a postscript, shakily written, telling her that all had gone well, and ending: "Nothing in this world



can make me happy if you are not kind." To the Duchess her husband must still be kneeling as in the early days of his courtship. His victories pleased her, but, in spite of them, he must remain in suspense, always doubting whether he retained her affections. What an example of the supreme genius of woman, exacting, under all conditions of fortune, surrender from the loved object !

The depth of Marlborough's passion for his wife is shown in the many letters written from the field in which his main desire is for a peaceful life by her side. The strength of her devotion to him is expressed in the long years of widowhood which she dedicated to his memory. It is this mutual affection that makes their story wonderful. Between them they had all that life could give—supreme achievement, control of men and affairs, fame, honour, power. But it all counted for little in their eyes, if only they could be together.

The romance of Marlborough's life is fully told for the first time in this book. The rest of his career is almost wholly epic. It may seem audacious to sum up a great man's record in a couple of words, since distinction in life rather suggests subtlety of character. But the Duke's nature was essentially simple. A few great motives determined his principal actions, and it was not in him to hold a delicate balance of consideration for and against. The variety, the complexity, the rapid shifts of thought and mood, that lend fascination to the study of Napoleon are lacking in Marlborough. His thought was clear and effective, but was not of the type called profound. Indeed, he had none of the love of thinking for its own sake by which most men would hold that their best selves were revealed. Instead, he had consummate military genius; and the curious thing about him is that he seems himself to have regarded his genius as some-

thing apart from his character. Possibly he could not even have explained why he became a soldier. Certainly he made no attempt to analyze the secret of his generalship. But there was an instinct in him that took command of his soul. It first asserted itself on the day when he first set foot on a parade-ground, and it never left him. When a political issue confronted him he was racked by doubts, but he never hesitated over a military problem, hardly seems to have realized that there was a problem. We do not know how he planned his campaigns. All we know is that he never sought advice from any other soldier, except from his trusted brother-in-arms, Prince Eugene. Some internal impulse seems to have dictated to him what he should do, and this impulse controlled his intellectual powers, at the same time raising them to a higher level. He made his preparations for a stroke with infinite patience, and there is something almost uncanny in the way that these preparations furthered the attainment of his eventual object. The military textbooks all speak of the unexpected in warfare. In Marlborough's strategy the unexpected never happens. The General acts as with a foreknowledge of the enemy's position and action. There was, of course, no such foreknowledge. What suggests it is the genius which immediately and unhesitatingly pointed to the one supremely adequate plan.

In this quality of military intuition there is only one figure in history that can be compared with him—Alexander the Great. Like Alexander, Marlborough was irresistible. There was no pitched battle in which he was not victorious, no fortified town which did not open its gates before him, no natural defence strengthened by all the ingenuity of skilled engineers which could check his advance. Had he lived in an age which glorified its heroes,

Marlborough, like Alexander, would have been viewed as a god. As it was, French mothers made of him a figure of terror with which to awe their children. Contemporary opinion could have paid no greater tribute to his marvellous generalship.

His career as a soldier lacks light and shade. The military difficulties which he overcame are less apparent than those by which Frederick the Great or Napoleon were confronted. On the battlefield Marlborough was not human as the word is generally understood. He did not regard himself as liable to the ordinary hazards of human life. It is told in this book how in one of his later battles, when his years were beginning to press upon him, and he bore the weight of a reputation which even the greatest soldier might have been concerned to maintain, he dashed into the thick of the fight with the boisterous recklessness of an ensign drunk with the excitement of his first skirmish. Had one of his officers ventured to rebuke him and bidden him be more mindful of his fame, he could only have replied that he trusted his star. It is perhaps because of his unvarying success that Marlborough does not make a greater appeal to the hero-worshipper. Only the skilled soldier, with professional knowledge of the difficulties which Marlborough brushed aside so easily that they seem never to have existed, can appreciate the full measure of his greatness. Napoleon, who was not given to acknowledge indebtedness to other men for his ideas, honoured him as his master, and in his own march from Boulogne to the Danube showed to what purpose he had studied the Blenheim campaign. That fact alone places Marlborough high among the world's greatest masters of war.

I have suggested that Marlborough himself treated his own genius as something apart. In this book it is recorded how, when reconnoitring a position, the

Duke dropped his handkerchief, motioned to one of his chief lieutenants to pick it up, and afterwards told him—what he had already guessed—that a battery was to be erected at the point. The whole episode reads like a piece of ritual, very different from the free interchange of opinion between a commander and his staff which reconnaissance work generally implies. Like Nelson, Marlborough was adored by his fellow-officers, but he would never have described himself as forming a band of brothers with them. All that we know of his conduct of operations indicates that he maintained a very rigid formalism; and he certainly admitted none of his officers to his intimacy. Prince Eugene was the only one of his comrades who was also in any real degree his friend, and Eugene paid Marlborough's genius avowed homage.

Though the Duke revered his own military gifts, he never became their slave. Enemies said that he had secured his appointment as Captain-General in order to wrest full control of the war into his own hands, and eventually to proclaim himself Lord Protector. Events soon showed the absurdity of the charge, but no one who had followed the Duke's career with understanding would ever have brought it. He regarded himself, or rather the genius of which he was the custodian, as dedicated to the service of his country. It would have been impossible for him to follow his star like Napoleon. The pursuit of ambition as an end in itself is the mark of the *parvenu*, and was foreign to Marlborough's characteristically gentle nature. The suggestion that he fought battles for the credit of winning them does him as great an injustice as the charge, actually brought by a contemporary partisan, that he prolonged the war in order to make money by selling the commissions of dead officers; and when he protested to his wife, in letters written from the field, that he

would far sooner be walking in a garden with her, he was absolutely sincere. His soldier's heart was eager, no doubt, to carry the war into France and dictate terms of peace from Paris. That, he felt, was how the war should have ended and might have ended. But that he should use his immense prestige to place himself at the head of an invading army in defiance of his Queen's wishes never occurred to him. To wage war because he could wage it successfully would have struck him as an abuse of the wonderful gift with which Providence had endowed him. When his Queen charged him to fight he was ready, but he felt debarred from using his genius except in obedience to her sovereign command.

Yet it has been said, and with a certain truth, that he was ambitious. It was, as it were, an impersonal desire for fame. It seemed to him a special mercy of Providence that his talents should have been placed at the disposal of England, and not of any other country; that because of him England was enabled to wreck the plans of the great Sovereign who threatened her liberties, and to shatter the nightmare of the junction of French and Spanish power in one man's hand. That such a boon should pass without formal thanks offended his sense of piety. Therefore he set himself to see that his exploits were worthily commemorated, and took it as a matter of course that no memorial could be too magnificent. The talent that won Blenheim must be honoured; and it was, as he felt it, only incidental that the honour should be bestowed upon his own person. It was his achievements, not himself, that were to be recognized by a grateful country. For this reason he determined that the stately palace which his countrymen intended to build should be named after the first and most dazzling of the victories that it recalled. But he felt that his fame would be the special heritage of his

descendants, and he determined that they should be in a position to maintain it. For them he saved money—which, however, he spent again generously enough when the needs of his country demanded it—and for them he collected pictures and tapestry in his travels through Europe. It seemed to him entirely fitting that his descendants should live in the building which was to bear eternal witness to his genius.

For personal glory, on the other hand, he cared not at all. It is true that Blenheim, as it stands to-day, is a memorial of the first Duke much more than a thank-offering for his victories. That, however, is not due to any conceit of Marlborough's. The house was only partially complete at the time of his death, and it was the Duchess who really changed his intentions in endeavouring to carry them out. It was not by any desire of hers that Blenheim was planned on so gigantic a scale; and she never quite understood what was in her husband's mind when he planned it. But she obeyed his wishes the more closely because she did not understand them; and, as she was incapable of drawing the distinction, of which he was so conscious himself, between his personality and his genius, she converted the house he had projected into the stateliest personal memorial that has ever been raised to any Englishman, and so helped to blind posterity to the modesty that was really one of her husband's qualities. Blenheim suggests the Duke as a man rather too ready to make his less fortunate fellows realize their own inferiority. It was thus that the Duchess would have behaved had she been a man, possessed of all the qualities that were hers, and of her husband's military gifts besides; and Blenheim enshrines her ideal and rather subjective version of him. But the man himself was other and finer.

Had Marlborough been the somewhat disdainful

Colossus of the Duchess's tradition, it would be easy to account for the charges of avarice and jealousy brought against him by contemporaries. The magnificent man must needs live magnificently, and does not brook rivals near his throne. But the evil tales of early eighteenth-century malice have been accepted by Macaulay, who, in belittling Marlborough, has converted into grave defects qualities which the Duchess would have had posterity regard as corollaries of her hero's surpassing greatness. Dr. Stuart Reid has dealt in this book with a charge, accepted by Macaulay, of meanness made effective by treason, and has shown how slender is the foundation for it. I do not here propose to examine all the counts in the indictment against Marlborough, and I have no desire to pass judgment without having tested the evidence. Still, the Duke's character would not have been attacked had there not been something in his conduct that gave colour to the accusations. That Marlborough saved money is true, though it must be remembered, to his credit, that he never stooped to corrupt gains. What I would ask is whether he was really the selfish miser that his enemies represented him. As I read him, he worked for his house, not for himself, and was inspired, as I have suggested above, by a wish to enable his descendants to support worthily their heritage of his fame.

As for his alleged jealousy of other officers, it would not accord with my conception of his character if he had been altogether free from some such feeling in the early stages of his career. Marlborough was determined that, when the hour called for the man, he should be that man; and the ground of his determination was the wholly sound conviction that no one could adequately take his place. In the light of after-events it is easy to say that such genius as his must have found its own level,

even if there had at first been half a dozen generals of the capacity of Louis's Marshals in higher commands than his own. The test of war would have revealed both them and him. But such criticism is not quite fair to its subject. Marlborough knew that he was great, but he could not anticipate the full measure of his greatness. Only experience could show that; and with experience Marlborough's confidence in his star increased, so that in the end, when the strain of war had begun to tell upon his health, and in reflective moods he was genuinely anxious for peace, he was nevertheless serenely ready for the supreme hazard of a march on Paris. But the Marlborough of 1692 could not have the self-confidence of the Marlborough of 1712; and it is especially easy to understand his jealousy of William III., the one Protestant general who was capable of undertaking a campaign against Louis XIV. He knew enough of William to foresee with what patience he would wear away the *élan* of the French King's armies and exhaust the vigour of his generals. He could forecast the ultimate success of this plan of cautious obstinacy, and could anticipate posterity's verdict that no other policy was feasible under the circumstances; and all the while he felt it in him to achieve a sweeping triumph of whose mere possibility the world would never dream unless he were given his chance.

The reading of the great soldier's character here set forth is, I grant, somewhat paradoxical. The conception of an individual as an instrument of Providence acting under an inspiration which he cannot explain, but which he reverently follows, though familiar enough as giving the key to the character of a saint, appears strained when applied to a general. Generalship, it may be objected, is a practical art usually revealed in a rapid synthesis of data. I can only reply that Marlborough's generalship was not of



that order. The best-trained mind may make a mistake, but Marlborough made none. That is why we credit him with genius. To attempt to account for genius by resolving it into elements found in an ordinary character is not to explain it, but to explain it away. I cannot myself see anything impossible in the idea that genius should be inexplicable to the mind of him who owns it; and I could illustrate my point from the case of artists, and especially of interpretative artists, whose powers have apparently quite failed to influence their characters as exhibited in ordinary social intercourse. To the objection that a great soldier is primarily a great soldier, and that his military qualities reveal themselves in all his other actions, I can fairly reply that Marlborough at the head of an army was a different being from Marlborough in politics or in private life—a fact well known to his friends, his enemies, and himself. In sum I would submit that an extraordinary man must remain extraordinary under analysis, and that human nature is an amazing thing to whose characteristics the epithet "impossible" must never be applied. With that I commend my estimate to the indulgence of my readers, begging them only to forget, in criticizing it, that they have ever read Macaulay.

Whatever may be thought of Marlborough as a soldier, there is no difficulty in forming a judgment of his quality as a politician. He had neither the firmness nor the variety of character that makes for success in politics. I have suggested that his conception of himself as the custodian of a wonderful trust helped to give the romantic colour to his temperament displayed in his relations with his wife. He was equally romantic in his political views; and here his upbringing strengthened his natural tendency. He came of a Royalist stock which feared God and honoured the King, and even regarded the

two parts of the precept as different facets of the same truth. That is why Marlborough hesitated so long in the supreme crisis of 1688. He stood at a parting of the ways, and in the end he decided to fear God at the cost of dishonouring the King. The issue was one over which the mere soldier, burning to cut a way to power by his sword, would never have hesitated. To such a man it would have been decisive that, whereas his services were indispensable to James, William was himself a very capable commander. But this aspect of the question never cost Marlborough a thought. The struggle for him was between his duty to his religion, in which he had never yet wavered, and his respect for the traditions of his family. His father had spent his last penny in the King's service, and was so proud of his losses that he perpetuated their memory in the motto of his house. Was Sir Winston Churchill's son to betray the son of King Charles? Or was the Protestant, whose place in the confidence of a Roman Catholic King had gone far to appease the fears of his countrymen, finally to prove false to his faith? That was the issue as Marlborough saw it; and history could afford to be merciful to one who decided wrongly when confronted by so hideous a dilemma. But Marlborough, after thinking it all out with the calm sagacity that was his distinguishing quality in politics, resolved to let the greater duty prevail.

The decision which he took was one of the weightiest in our history. It is too readily assumed—and here again we may trace the influence of the great Whig historian—that, when William was invited to land in England, the sands of the Stuarts had run out of the glass, and that the country had finally made up its mind. The events of the quarter of a century between the dethronement of James and the death of Anne prove the contrary. They prove that, in

spite of the exasperation against James, there was among Englishmen a very real attachment to the dynasty. The Stuart cause in England collapsed, in fact, for lack of a leader. In 1688 Marlborough was the only possible leader; and from a conviction, in which he never wavered, of the supreme value of religious liberty, he refused to lead. For this England still owes him her thanks. Happily for her, as well as for himself, he did not seek his Blenheim on the Boyne. Macaulay, however, is so far from acknowledging this debt that he founds upon Marlborough's conduct in 1688 a charge of the blackest ingratitude. His view, if I understand him aright, is that, even in the weightiest issues, the individual is bound by his own past, and that nothing can excuse disregard of personal ties. It is true enough that in all ordinary circumstances a man should stand by his friends; yet history abounds with instances of men who have won the approval of posterity because they broke with life-long associations for the sake of some greater national end. In this particular case we may refute Macaulay with the paradox which follows from his own assertions. It would have been an evil day for England had Marlborough actually taken the decision which Macaulay considers it was his duty to take. The chances are that, backed as he would have been by his own troops, by the King's adherents, and by the wealth and influence of Louis XIV., he would have overwhelmed the hostile combination which William had formed, and would have gone down to history as a sinister figure who had riveted on his countrymen a faith to which he did not himself subscribe. Let Whig historians discuss ethics as they will, Protestant England is Marlborough's final and enduring vindication.

The point has been taken that, by his subsequent intrigues with St. Germain, Marlborough undid the

merit of his previous service to Protestantism, and forfeited his claim to be regarded as a true patriot. It is an anachronistic point. The Revolution was not regarded as a final settlement even by the men who brought it about; and when it became apparent that it would involve the accession of the House of Hanover—an event regarded by the Convention Parliament as a distant possibility—the restoration of the Stuarts became not only practicable, but desirable. After all, there was something to be said for a dynasty which, with all its faults, was at least national and not alien. There were many besides Marlborough who were prepared to consider the accession of the Old Pretender. Indeed, if adherence to the letter of the Act of Settlement is to be treated, in conformity with the Whiggish theory, as the test of loyalty, then Anne herself must be suspected of treason. But Marlborough never lost his grip of the point that England could not endure a Roman Catholic King. He had suffered too much in arriving at this belief ever to think of its abandonment; and, when once he was fully satisfied that James's son was firm in his attachment to Rome, he openly placed all his influence and prestige at the disposal of the Hanoverians. In all this he was a disinterested servant of his country. On the other hand, he was undoubtedly relieved to obtain a pardon from St. Germain. Though he never went back on his decision of 1688, though he never really regretted it, it was reached in defiance of his instincts. The choice between his faith and his King had necessarily left a sore memory; and it was for the sake of his peace of mind that, without in any way compromising his country, he sought for pardon and rejoiced when he obtained it.

Marlborough was at least consistent in that his heart was always firm to the Stuarts. The King's daughters

might replace the King as objects of allegiance, but not the King's sons-in-law. Prince George accepted what Marlborough regarded as his proper position, and with him he was on the best of terms. But William III. he regarded as an interloper who owed his title to the fact that Mary would not become Queen unless it were given him; and, though he was not wanting in outward respect, in the privacy of Mrs. Morley's circle he, too, may have referred to his Sovereign as Caliban. But it was his good-fortune that, when his services were most needed, there was at the head of the State one whom he could serve with true devotion. To Marlborough, who was a Tory by instinct, co-operating with Whigs because there was no other way, it meant everything that Anne was Queen by right. The Duchess, on the other hand, regarded her as Queen by necessity, and became a Whig by logic.

It may be said—Macaulay would possibly have said it if his "History" had been carried farther—that, though some excuse can be made for the Duchess in that she did not allow the Queen's Tory prejudices to weigh with her against her ideas of the nation's needs, there is no excuse for Marlborough, who grasped at power at the price of working with men with whose political principles he disagreed. The criticism misreads Marlborough's mind. The notion that party could be a final division in politics was abhorrent to him. It was helpful enough in its place, no doubt; but when the Queen called on men to unite in her service, party feeling must be laid aside. He had no patience with the doctrine, upon which the party system is founded, that the Sovereign reigns but does not govern. In his view it was the Queen's proper business to govern, assisted by the advice of the ablest statesmen in her realm, Whig and Tory alike. At the Cabinet meetings on Sunday afternoons their various opinions could be

stated in the Sovereign's presence. Then the Queen would decide, and all would naturally accept her decision. Who could contradict the Queen? Marlborough's ideal of a Council of Elder Statesmen was partially realized in the earlier half of her reign, though even then Godolphin was more of a Prime Minister and Anne more of a constitutional monarch, as we now understand the terms, than the Duke would have cared to admit. But these, at any rate, were his happy days.

In his attitude towards the Crown, Marlborough was in reaction against the fanatical royalism of the previous generation. He served a Sovereign whose blood gave her the right to rule in England, but who, nevertheless, owed her throne to the staunchness of her Protestantism. It was for the same reasons that the average Englishman of a century and a half before had accepted Elizabeth; and, like the Elizabethans, Marlborough turned necessity into an ideal. In the true Elizabethan spirit he cast a glory about Anne, treating her like a being apart. This was the truth to which Macaulay penetrated, and is the secret of his unmeasured hatred of Marlborough. He saw that, of all the men living in 1688, Marlborough alone both believed in a practicable form of absolutism and had the capacity which might have maintained it. He saw that, if the Duke had finally had his way, there would have been no constitutional government as the Whigs understood it—no party system, no Reform Bill. It did not seem possible to Macaulay that one whose views were, in his judgment, so evil could be anything but evil all through; and he set himself to blacken Marlborough's character with the same motive and with something of the same success as the early Tudor chroniclers who vilified the memory of Richard III. It is our business to make a more dispassionate judgment.

We must admit that Marlborough's political ideas were doomed from the first. It was the tragedy of his life that he had to abandon the King who, under happier conditions, might have put them into practice. Anne never so much as contemplated the attempt. The shadow of power as shown by a rigid etiquette was enough for her; and if Marlborough ever expounded to her his conception of her functions as Sovereign, she was probably shrewd enough to smile. But what we have to note is that, though Marlborough acted upon his principles whenever he could, he always knew just when to stop. As he abandoned James II., so he established George I.; and he must have understood that in both instances his conduct was weakening monarchy as he conceived it. Nevertheless, he did the thing which, as he saw, must needs be done. Test him by the unbending rules of logic, and he is no outstanding figure as a politician. But politics is not an exact science, and perhaps it is fair to say that political greatness consists in knowing just when it becomes unsafe to push a principle home. Marlborough always knew that; and, for the rest, the political game did not appeal to him. He was fully content to leave it to his wife, although aware that her views were not his own. Relying on her, he never made a political decision until he was driven to it. We see in him a man who with difficulty and reluctance did the right thing, making uneasy but very workable compromises between circumstances and ideals, at an epoch of crisis when rigid insistence on any strict political theory was certain to mislead. There is nothing heroic about him in this aspect; but neither is there anything ignoble.

It was well that Marlborough trusted his wife so completely in political affairs, for she was not the woman to endure contradiction, even from him, when once she was convinced that her judgment was sound. She had the quality, so invaluable in a politician, of

strength of character; indeed, had it been a little less marked, she would appear a more sympathetic figure. Her temperament, as revealed in her writings and conduct, is sometimes so harsh as to be repellent, but in the end its firmness attracts. Like all strong natures, she developed early; and her main qualities stand out clearly enough in the little collection of notes which she preserved in memory of her courtship. All through her life she knew her own mind, and, having once made it up, regarded it as a weakness to listen to objections. Her clear-sighted determination first won her the confidence of the shy Princess Anne; but Anne, too, could be obstinate on occasion, and when the two wills clashed there was no hope of compromise. The final breach was as natural, in its way, as the long friendship.

The Duchess was a woman of business with a taste for politics. Her sex compelled her to exercise power as favourite, and not as Minister; but her authority was never wielded after the selfish, capricious wont of favourites. In all but name she was a member of the Government, and when the Government changed its political colour her position became impossible. If she did not surrender it without demur, that was because its loss involved the collapse of an old friendship as well as the abandonment of power. Her final interview with the Queen was a protest against personal injustice, free from any touch of political intrigue. She was not an ambitious woman, though, when a high position became hers, she discharged its functions almost as a matter of course, and with the satisfaction that capacity always feels in its own manifestations. But, however much she may have rejoiced in the exercise of her conspicuous qualities of honesty, truthfulness, and clearness of thought, it is her due to remember that she owed her greatness to a friendship based upon disinterested affection, and formed



in days when the future seemed to have nothing but obscurity in store for Princess Anne; and that, when once she had fallen from power, she made no attempt to recover her lost glories. For the last thirty years of her life she watched political affairs with characteristic shrewdness, expressing her opinions as boldly as she formed them, and showing by her bequest to William Pitt that to the end of her days she retained her sure judgment of men.

Her vision was clear. Royalty had no glamour for her, as it had for her husband; and for this reason she was a Progressive in politics. Her experience had taught her that Kings were the slaves of passion, and Queens of sentiment, whereas government required to be in strong hands. To her the choice seemed to be whether a favourite or a group of party men should rule in England, and, with her customary sanity, she decided in favour of rule by party. She could hardly have foreseen the lines on which the Cabinet system was to develop, though her antipathy to Queen Caroline in later years is evidence that she appreciated the true drift of events, and was opposed to any new attempt to concentrate power in the irresponsible hands of the Sovereign. But in her great days she probably made no attempt to work out the philosophy of her political position. Her outlook was eminently practical; she worked with the politicians instead of intriguing against them in the interests of the Throne, because she knew herself to be dealing with men who were thoroughly capable of transacting State business. It is characteristic of her that the one charge which really rankled was the charge of financial incapacity or worse. It is equally characteristic that she was able to rebut it in detail by publishing her accounts.

Shortly after her dismissal from the Queen's service her wounded pride prompted her to write an indignant vindication which her friends, happily, dissuaded her

from publishing. Thirty years later she put together a very different apologia, which was the sensation of its day, though the prejudiced condemnation of Macaulay has now dismissed it to undeserved oblivion. It is as remarkable a work as any woman ever wrote, and, considering that its author was over eighty when she wrote it, its clearness, conciseness, and point, compel as much astonishment as admiration. But its outstanding quality is its fairness; and historians have rightly paid the Duchess the compliment of accepting as authentic her account of her final breach with the Queen. It would have been easy for her to make a contemptible figure out of a Queen who was weak even in her obstinacy. But even in that closing scene, when Anne could do nothing but repeat the one sentence, "You asked for no answer, and I give you none," which summed up her attitude, there is a royal air about her. The parties to the quarrel seem to meet on equal terms, though the Queen had, in fact, no advantage except her rank. The Duchess's reputation both for capacity and fair-mindedness is established by this account. Perhaps, too, through long dwelling upon her husband's memory, she had come to look back upon events through his eyes. At any rate, in the closing decade of her life she seems rather to have forgotten the Anne on whom she was on terms of intimate friendship, and to have remembered the Queen graciously conferring unexampled honours on the greatest of her subjects. Certainly it is the Queen whom Marlborough revered, and not the Mrs. Morley with whom Mrs. Freeman exchanged domestic confidences, whose statue the Duchess had set up at Blenheim as a part of her memorial to her husband.

The relations of the old Duchess with her children and grandchildren do not make up an attractive story. It cannot be claimed for her that she ever accepted the principle of give and take so essential to a happy

family life; and in this regard even her husband's pleas were unable to soften her autocratic temper. But here, too, something may be said in her defence. Her family did not treat her with the deference shown her by all the world, her Sovereign and her husband not excepted. She, on the other hand, felt most of them to be her inferiors, and was perhaps a little disappointed that her own talents had not been transmitted to them in more abundant measure. Where she detected ability she allowed it a good deal of licence; and to her grandson, Jack Spencer, in particular, she permitted a freedom of speech such as she never tolerated from anyone else. It must be remembered, too, that hers was a dominating character, which for the last thirty years of her life lacked scope for action, and therefore asserted itself violently in the narrow field left open to it. But in the last resort it is not as a mother, nor even as a wife, that she must be judged. She belongs to history. No woman not of royal rank has ever held before, or is ever likely to hold again, such a position as was hers during the critical years of the early eighteenth century, when the map of Europe and the constitution of England were in the making. It is to her eternal credit that she used her power honestly, consistently, and with a single eye to her country's best interests.

A perverse literary destiny has pursued John Churchill. It was his widow's desire that his Life should be worthily written; but, as Dr. Stuart Reid records, her judgment of men, usually so unerring, was at fault in her choice of a biographer. But at least she made of the Life of Marlborough one of the most fascinating might-have-beens of literary history. Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Steele, Viscount Molesworth, and Lord Chesterfield, were the men to whom, at one time or another, she thought of entrusting, and in one case actually entrusted, the Duke's papers. Those who take delight in

intellectual parody might amuse themselves by sketching out one of the central chapters of the biography as it might have been if written first by Voltaire and then by Chesterfield, with the Duchess's own critical annotations in each case. The exercise would at least serve to bring out the wide variety of judgment possible upon undisputed matters of fact.

Unhappily for Marlborough's fame, not one of these five projected biographies was even begun. On the other hand, his enemies were not backward in using their literary arts against him. The evil tradition established by Swift's biting pen has been strengthened by the polite disdain of Horace Walpole, and confirmed by the vindictive prejudice of Macaulay. The adverse balance has hitherto awaited complete redress; and historical students will be grateful to Dr. Stuart Reid for his careful survey of the period and his painstaking investigation of material a considerable part of which escaped even the vigilant eye of Dr. Coxe. His book is a new and independent presentment of both the Duke and the Duchess, and I commend it to my readers, believing that they will find in it both a glorious romance of human life and a moving epic passage in our country's history.

\* \* \* \* \*

The harsh fate which clouded the domestic happiness of John and Sarah with overwhelming grief for the loss of their two sons ironically decreed that their vast possessions should descend through the daughter named after their benefactress, the Queen. Charles Spencer, upon whom the family estates eventually devolved, was the son and grandson of First Ministers. The twenty-fourth of his line, he brought the tradition of statecraft to a house built to commemorate military achievement; and the compound name of his descendants is emblematic of the union of the two qualities. It may be that his rollicking spirit would

have preferred the simple delights of the chase at Althorp to the responsibility of administering the nation's magnificent gift to its victorious hero. But he accepted his duty, and his descendants have striven to act in his spirit. Blenheim, as they have maintained it, is the most splendid relic of the age of Anne, and there is no building in Europe, except Versailles, which so perfectly preserves its original atmosphere, and so adequately enshrines the memory of the man for whom and for whose victory it was called into being. It may be that the time will come when democracy, in the nation's name, will try to recall the nation's gift. Meanwhile, on behalf of the family to whom this trust was committed, I offer my tribute of gratitude to the memory of THE QUEEN by whose hand it was bestowed.

MARLBOROUGH.

BLENHHEIM,  
*April 18, 1914.*

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# JOHN AND SARAH DUKE AND DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY DAYS OF SARAH JENNINGS

ENGLAND was alive with rejoicing in 1660. It was the dawn of a new era. Charles II., ever plausible and even then diplomatic, had come to terms with the Convention Parliament. He had issued at Breda an amnesty which safeguarded the life, liberty, and property of all but a few of his future subjects—the men who were not easily forgiven. He had promised liberty of conscience to all whose views did not disturb the peace of the realm; he had left to Parliament the settlement of all outstanding claims to landed estates; and he had pledged himself to the payment of arrears to General Monk's army, which had brought about the Restoration. The Roundheads had lost their power. The Cavaliers were in ascendancy. The mood of the nation had changed. The austere rule of the Puritans was over, and Cromwell's masterful authority had not long survived. The Restoration, though not universally popular, was an accomplished fact. Charles landed at Dover on the 25th of May, 1660. The royal progress to London was not merely stately in itself, but was a perfect triumph. The King entered the capital four days later, and the exile of the House of Stuart was ended amid a flourish of trumpets and the cheers and illuminations of the citizens.



Twenty miles away from London, at Sandridge, near the ancient town of St. Albans, a week later, a child was born who was destined to play a great part in the last reign of that illustrious but ill-fated House. There seemed small likelihood just then that the daughter of a country squire, who had fought for the Royalists during the Civil War and impoverished himself in consequence, would ever rise to a high position in the State. But it is the unexpected that happens in life, and the great career of this child of Richard Jennings and Frances his wife—born on the 5th of June, 1660, amid neither lowly nor exalted surroundings—did not falsify such an assertion.

The Jennings family had flourished on their own land for many generations, and from the reign of Henry VIII. had been people of consequence in the county of Hertford. John Jenyns—for so the name was then spelt—Sarah's grandfather, was a prosperous country gentleman when the days of the Tudors were ended, and James I. succeeded Elizabeth. The worthy squire built himself a spacious mansion in 1610, called Water End House, Sandridge. He was High-Sheriff of Herts in 1625, was made a Knight of the Bath by James, sat in the Long Parliament in the reign of Charles I., and, when England was divided into two hostile camps at the outbreak of the Civil War, took sides with the Royalists, and raised troops for the defence of the Throne.

His son, Richard Jennings, was also a Member of Parliament, in the last years of Charles I.'s reign, and, when the Commonwealth had become a memory, was elected again in 1661, and held that position until his death in 1668. He married, in 1643, Frances, daughter of Sir Gifford Thornhurst, a baronet in the county of Kent. Richard Jennings was twenty-four and his bride eighteen at the time of the marriage,

which took place in London at the Church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. Five children were born of this union. Two of them were sons, John and Ralph, but, as both died without issue, the family property fell to the daughters Frances, Barbara, and Sarah. Barbara wedded Edward Griffith, Esquire, of St. Albans, and died at the age of twenty-six in 1678. There is a monument to her in the Abbey Church of that city. Her only child died in the following year, and, in consequence, the family patrimony was divided equally between Frances and Sarah.

James, Duke of York, brother of Charles II., married, in the year of Sarah Jennings' birth, Lady Anne Hyde, daughter of the Earl of Clarendon, by whom he had two daughters, both of whom in due course came to the throne—Mary, who reigned conjointly with her husband William III., and Queen Anne, who succeeded in her own right, and was the last Sovereign of the House of Stuart. Mary was born in 1662, and Anne in 1664, and in the intervening year the first association of the Jennings family with the Court began with the appointment of Frances, afterwards Duchess of Tyrconnel, as Maid of Honour to the Duchess of York. The Restoration brought many Cavaliers in search of preferment, either for themselves or for their children, to Court, who had fought for the Royal Cause during the Civil War. Richard Jennings was already in Parliament, and sought nothing for himself, but he was proud to place his daughter in the household of the Duchess of York. She was a lively, high-spirited girl of fifteen, who lives in the pages of Grammont as "La belle Jennyns." That lively chronicler, who was nothing if not gallant, said she looked like "Aurora, the Goddess of Spring."

Honoré Courtin, French Ambassador at St. James's, declared that Frances Jennings was the most beautiful young lady in England. Presently he came to

know her well, for the young Marquis de Berni, son of Hugues de Lionne, Foreign Secretary to Louis XIV., came over to England as his guest. The lad was only nineteen; he was shy, embarrassed, and had seen little of the world. It was thought that he might acquire some polish at the English Court, especially with the Ambassador as guide, philosopher, and friend. The young Marquis was bewitched by the fair Maid of Honour. Courtin leaves us in no doubt of that, for he says:

"The Marquis has been very well received by one of the finest girls in England, Mademoiselle Genins of the household of the Duchess of York. She is small, but with a fine figure, a splendid complexion. The hair—such as you remember Madame de Longueville's was—brilliant, keen eyes, and the whitest and smoothest skin I ever saw. The Duchess, who is generally severe in such things, finds the two so well suited that she is the first to favour them. The Queen-Mother, the King, and all the Court act accordingly. People laugh, but I assure you the thing goes on well."<sup>1</sup>

It was a boy-and-girl attachment, which came to nothing. The Marquis de Berni was soon recalled by his father to France, and Frances Jennings had too many ardent admirers to make much ado about his departure.

By a strange coincidence, at this time a certain West-Country squire, who had also given a good account of himself in the Civil War, was knighted, and so became Sir Winston Churchill. As his estates had become impoverished in the cause of Charles I., he was appointed comptroller of the Board of Green Cloth. Soon afterwards his daughter Arabella became another Maid of Honour to the Duchess of

<sup>1</sup> Jusserand, "A French Ambassador at the Court of Charles II.," pp. 153-155.

York, and was thus brought into close association with Frances Jennings.

Sir Winston had a handsome young son, who, at the time when Frances Jennings first appeared at Whitehall, was a boy of thirteen at St. Paul's school. John Churchill, though a lad of shining parts, was not conspicuous for his love of learning, and probably was not much distressed when the school was burnt down in the Great Fire of London in 1666. A year later, when he was scarcely seventeen, he also found a place at Court, as page to the Duke of York; shortly after he had entered the army, his sister Arabella caught the fancy of James. The Duke was almost as susceptible to the charms of the ladies as his brother Charles II. Frances Jennings, and afterwards her sister Sarah had good reason to know this, though they both declined his advances—the latter with a characteristic touch of disdain.

Frances Jennings, as merry a Maid of Honour as ever graced Whitehall, though she walked in slippery places and had some lively escapades, kept her self-respect, and with it that of her unwelcome admirers.

"What mad freaks," wrote Secretary Pepys in his inimitable Diary, "the Maids of Honour at Court have! That Mistress Jennings, one of the Duchess's Maids, the other day dressed herself like an orange wench, and went up and down and cried oranges, till, falling down, her frail shoes were discovered, and she put to a great deal of shame."<sup>1</sup>

The beautiful girl, so beautiful that she was one of the reigning belles of the Restoration, escaped from the Court by her marriage with Captain Sir George Hamilton of the King's Guards, the brother of another Maid of Honour. He was also the brother of Anthony Hamilton, who wrote the *De Grammont Memoirs*. Sir George subsequently served under Turenne, rose

<sup>1</sup> February 21, 1664-65.

to be a Major-General in the French Army, and was killed in action in 1676. She remained a widow for three years, and then married Colonel, or, as he was then called, "Lying Dick Talbot." On the accession of James II., he was made Duke of Tyrconnel, and in the last year of that uneasy reign, Viceroy of Ireland.

Richard Jennings died in 1668, and was buried, like others of the family, in the Abbey Church of St. Albans. No one mourned him more sincerely than his youngest daughter Sarah, who, in truth, was the spoilt darling of his old age. She was a child of eight at the time, and, when the shadow of death fell on the old home at Sandridge, the little girl was quick to realize that life for her was altered. Her mother, somehow, never counted for much with her, perhaps because they were too much alike in temper and will.

Mistress Jennings by this time was becoming uneasy about the lively escapades of her pretty daughter at Court, and perhaps wishful to see a little of the great world herself, eagerly accepted the offer, which was made to her on the death of her husband, of apartments at St. James's Palace.

So it came to pass that Sarah for the space of four years was left in the charge of trusty servants in the old house. It was not an ideal arrangement, for the dependents who surrounded her worshipped the saucy, merry child, and allowed her to do pretty much as she liked. She received little education in the bookish sense, but grew well versed in that practical household lore which girls in the seventeenth century had not learnt to despise. It is easy to picture her romping about the roomy old house with its mul-tioned windows and open staircase, a pretty child-despot, of warm temper and high spirit, whom no one ventured to curb, and who lived in a dream-world, dashed at times with a touch of discontent

when her thoughts turned to her sister Frances, and all the glitter of Whitehall, with its drawing-rooms and its balls.

Poor little Cinderella ! It was assuredly hard to be shut up in that great house by herself, even though, on rare occasions, the dull monotony of life was broken by a flying visit to Court, where she met another neglected child, the shy Princess Anne. The Duke of York was too busy amusing himself to take more than a languid interest in his motherless daughters Mary and Anne, and though their surroundings were those of their rank, their childhood was almost as lonely as that of Sarah herself. The Princess Anne, unlike her sister, was timid and distrustful. She did not easily make friends, and was not sufficiently attractive to be more than tolerated in the gay, boisterous Court of Charles II., with its crowd of great ladies of doubtful reputation.

But Sarah Jennings caught her fancy with her ready laugh, her fearless bearing, her breezy, frolicsome temper. It was a case of love at first sight, the love of a timid, forlorn little Princess, altogether in leading-strings, for a girl five years older than herself, who held her head high, and did not seem to care a jot for anybody. So the two played together on those rare occasions when Mistress Jennings, with a touch of womanly compunction, brought Sarah back to Whitehall after one or other of her not too frequent visits to see how her household at St. Albans was comporting itself. Once, so tradition runs, the little Princess Anne herself came thither, and, after running about the fields, madcap fashion with Sarah, went back sorrowfully to Whitehall with envy in her heart for the unchartered liberty of Cinderella.

All things come, so runs the saying, to those who wait, and when the Duke of York, tired of single blessedness, made a second adventure in

matrimony by wedding that pretty Papist, Princess Mary of Modena, who was little more than a girl, the gates of opportunity opened suddenly to Sarah Jennings. Mary of Modena, only daughter of Duke Alfonso IV., was only two years older than Sarah Jennings, whilst the Duke was a man of forty. She had been brought up in strict seclusion, was deeply religious, and, if she had followed her own inclination, it was the Cloister, and not the Court, that would have claimed her. But Louis XIV. was anxious, in his own fashion, for the conversion of England to the Roman Catholic Church, and quite as anxious also to bring the nation into acquiescence with the ambitious schemes of France.

Charles II. was subservient enough; nothing mattered much, not even the honour of England, to that easy-going monarch of lax scruples, so long as his own pleasures were undisturbed. But James, Duke of York, was fashioned of less pliable clay; he was endowed with a stiff and obstinate temper, and Louis XIV. was uneasy as to what might happen when he came to the throne on his brother's death. Under these circumstances it came to pass that Mary of Modena, in 1673, was compelled to give her hand, as a mere girl of fifteen, to this cold, disillusioned, and headstrong Prince.

The Duke of York did not stand well with the English people. He was stubborn, morose, bigoted, and altogether destitute of the saving grace of humour which distinguished his light-hearted brother Charles. The young Duchess of York had, in consequence, to make her own welcome, which was a task all the more difficult as she took the religion in which she had been brought up seriously. She was a kind stepmother to the daughters of James. Presently Sarah Jennings, the friend and confidante of the Princess Anne, crossed her path. The young Duchess

took an instinctive liking to the vivacious girl, who had just entered her teens, and so it happened that Mistress Sarah Jennings was appointed one of the new Maids of Honour to the Duchess of York, with the modest salary of twenty pounds a year. She had her shapely foot on the ladder now, and she determined to mount it, for, although only a girl of thirteen, she had a will of her own.

The marriage of the Duke of York to Mary of Modena cannot, even by a stretch of courtesy, be called an affair of the heart. The Duke was mature, suspicious, disillusioned. He did not parade his vices as openly as Charles II., but he was just as dissolute. Mary Beatrix was young, eager, innocent, and radiantly beautiful. It was hoped that her "sweet carriage," to borrow the quaint phrase of the period, would charm even the sullen Puritans, who, though coerced at the Restoration, were anything but a negligible quantity in the public life of the nation.

Princesses in those days were moved about the chessboard of Europe like so many pawns; their own inclinations were calmly set aside if they stood in the way of international politics. The marriage was in reality one of the results of the secret treaty made at Dover in 1670 between Charles II. and Louis XIV. By that treaty Charles became the pensioner of France. He pledged himself to make profession of the Roman Catholic religion and to join his armies to those of Louis in order to shatter the power of the United Provinces, and in every way, by land or sea, to uphold the rights of the House of Bourbon to the monarchy of Spain. Louis, in return, pledged himself to the payment of a large annual sum to Charles, and also undertook to uphold his throne if ever it was placed in jeopardy by the rebellion of his subjects.

The majority of men, to their credit, do not change



their religion lightly; indeed, the better they are the more they hesitate to take so momentous a step. But Charles was of an accommodating temper, and was without convictions—it was a mere matter of slipping out of one coat into another. In his gratitude to Louis for relief from financial embarrassment, he was ready to go to Mass at once, and brave public opinion. But Louis XIV. checked his impulsive ardour. No monarch ever kept himself better informed, through his ambassadors, of the real sentiments of other nations. He knew therefore that it would be the height of folly for the King of England just then to flout the religious instincts of his subjects; so he told Charles to go to work more cautiously, and to continue to pay outward respect to the Protestant faith by attendance at the services of the Church of England. Charles, so long as weighty affairs of State were not unduly pressed upon him, was the most pliant of men. He took the Communion in public, though it was within common knowledge that his sympathies were with Rome. Religious scruples counted for nothing with a man like Charles; they lay in a region which made no appeal to him. But his leanings, such as they were, were determined by the wish to stand well with France. He was at heart a Roman Catholic of the easy, careless type, and he would have stood revealed as such if policy had not suggested dissimulation. It was only when that showy life of hypocrisy was flickering out at Whitehall that Father Huddleston, at the instance of the Duke of York, was hurriedly brought to the sick chamber in order to receive the dying king into the Roman Church.

The Duke of York was an avowed Roman Catholic long before his marriage with Mary of Modena. She only came to strengthen his hands, and to make him popular, if possible, by her beauty and charm. The English people knew nothing about the secret article in the

Treaty of Dover as to the King's religion and the payment of £200,000 a year to his privy purse, which made the treaty acceptable to the extravagant Charles. Hence, it came about that the children of his brother James, the Princess Mary and the Princess Anne, against the wishes of their own father, were brought up by the King's command as Protestants. It threw the nation off its guard when Mary and Anne, who stood in the direct line of succession to the throne, received, in accordance with the Law, a strictly Protestant education, and were duly confirmed, in 1666, by a bishop of the Church of England. Probably Charles imagined, if he ever allowed his thoughts to wander so far, that it would be an easy matter for them to change their religion when the occasion arose. It is more likely, however, that he believed that the chance of their succession was a remote contingency, in view of James's marriage with Mary of Modena; otherwise, the King would not have consented to the union, in 1677, of the Princess Mary of York with William of Orange.

Miss Sarah Jennings was for the space of ten years attached to the household of the Duchess of York, and as her beauty ripened, she became one of the most attractive Maids of Honour at the Court. She captured the homage of many admirers; it was even rumoured that the Duke of York himself, from whom she instinctively recoiled, paid her marked and significant attention, charmed by her gay repartee and high spirit, quite as much perhaps as by her fair face. But though she was merry and free of speech, she could bridle up on occasion, and no one dared to take a liberty with her. So she remained, high in the favour of Mary of Modena, deep in the confidence of the Princess Anne—a maiden, not forlorn, set in the splendour of the Court, yet fancy-free.

Sarah was in no hurry to be matched, and, to do her

justice, in spite of her mother's misgivings, she was quite able to take care of herself. Youth is apt to be self-confident, and to scorn advice, and it came about that between the lively Maid of Honour and her anxious mother sharp words passed. The opinion was expressed on the one side, that it was high time to beat a retreat to St. Albans, and on the other, that the Court was much too delightful a place to be lightly abandoned. Sarah was not to be intimidated. She did not like to be watched. She told her mother that unless she left her lodgings in St. James's, she herself would run away. She carried her point; her indignant parent vanished from the scene, and Sarah was left to follow her own inclinations, which, to her credit, were innocent enough.

## CHAPTER II

### COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

FORTUNE did not smile, even at the Restoration, upon the Churchills, in spite of the sacrifices Sir Winston had made during the Civil War. The official appointments which he obtained were not lucrative, whilst his own patrimony was impoverished; and so it came to pass, that when he died an old man in 1688, the little he had to leave was barely enough for the modest needs of his widow. Sir Winston had twelve children, and though seven of them died young, it is small wonder that all he could do for those that survived was to give them, as best he might, a start in life. Arabella was his eldest child, and the only one of his daughters who grew to womanhood, and she became, as already stated, a Maid of Honour.

His four sons served their country in one capacity or another. John and Charles entered the army, and whilst the first became the most illustrious soldier of his day, his younger brother bore the brunt of much hard fighting in the War of the Spanish Succession, and died with the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1715, leaving a reputation which would have counted for more on the page of history if it had not been eclipsed by the splendour of Marlborough's military achievements.

George entered the navy when the Duke of York was Lord High Admiral, apparently, through the influence of his sister Arabella. He was in

command of a man-of-war at the Revolution, and his ship was the first to come to the help of William of Orange in 1688. He afterwards saw some hard fighting at Beachy Head and at Cherbourg, and rose to the rank of Admiral. After he quitted the sea at the beginning of Queen Anne's reign, he was practically supreme at the Admiralty, for six eventful years under Prince George of Denmark. He never stood high in the regard of the Queen, who, in truth, did not like him, though Prince George placed great reliance on his judgment. George Churchill died at the age of fifty-eight in 1710—a year which witnessed the turning-point in Marlborough's fortunes.

Theobald, the youngest member of the family, was of serious bent and bookish tastes. He was educated at Queen's College, Oxford, took Orders, and was Chaplain to the Royal Dragoons in 1684, when John Churchill was Colonel of that regiment. He died, however, in the following year at the early age of twenty-two.

John Churchill did not long remain a page in the household of the Duke of York. The high-spirited, handsome, and ambitious lad was in attendance on His Royal Highness on all ceremonial occasions, and few things pleased James more than to put the Guards through their drill in Hyde Park. John Churchill had quick eyes and a retentive memory, and he quickly learned, as he stood at his royal master's side, the details of such parades. The lad's enthusiasm betrayed itself to the Duke. One day he turned, half amused, to his page and asked him what he would like to be. "A soldier," was the quick response. He took his master by storm by asking there and then for a commission in the King's regiment of Foot Guards, which at that moment was under review. His bold request was granted, and so in September, 1667, Ensign John Churchill, at the age of seventeen, obtained his com-

mission in His Majesty's Army. It was the first step on a ladder which carried him higher than almost any other soldier who has ever climbed to glory. Macaulay, in his "History" (vol. i., p. 224, ed. 1871), leads the reader to suppose that Churchill owed his appointment to the intrigue between his sister Arabella and the Duke of York. On the contrary, he had received his first commission a year before the liaison began.

Ensign Churchill, between seventeen and twenty, cut a handsome figure at the Court. He danced well, was adroit in compliment, and quick in repartee. His good looks and easy bearing made him a favourite, especially with the ladies.

He was sent to Tangier in 1670, a place which had become an appanage to the Crown on the marriage of Charles II. with Catherine of Braganza. Anyhow, it was in Tangier—the place was relinquished by England in 1683 because of its vile climate and the expense of keeping a garrison there—that the young soldier first drew his sword in the sharp conflicts which continually arose between the English troops, under Colonel Kirke, and the turbulent and aggressive Moors who disputed their authority. Tangier, in the reign of Charles II., was a sort of training-ground to which young officers were sent to win their spurs, and Ensign Churchill was assuredly better employed in warding off invaders than in dangling about the Court. He displayed no lack of daring in repelling the Moors, who had made many attempts to storm this fortified seaport, and it was at Tangier that he learnt his first lessons in the science of strategy.

He came back to England a manly, sunburnt young officer early in 1671, and resumed his place at Court in attendance on his old master the Duke of York. Grammont describes him as looking idle and elegant.

He was tall, slim, well-proportioned, with a shapely, well-poised head, luxuriant fair hair, a sensitive, finely chiselled face, a firm mouth, and keen blue eyes, which were rendered still more attractive by arched and boldly marked eyebrows. One of his contemporaries, who did not at all like him as a man, was forced to admit that John Churchill had manners which no one could resist, irrespective of rank or sex. He was genial though not talkative, and possessed the art of ingratiating himself with everyone whom he addressed. Churchill, at twenty-one, was already a finished courtier, quick to see and to seize all the opportunities of advancement that came in his way, and with stories to tell of military adventures as far afield as the wild coast of Morocco.

Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine, was just then at the height of her power. Charles II. was absolutely under the spell of her beauty, but she was by no means equally devoted to him, though he had just created her Duchess of Cleveland. She was a woman who followed her fancy wherever it led her, and her endless intrigues were the gossip of the Court. The Duchess, who was the most unprincipled of the King's mistresses, and, if Lely's portrait of her is to be trusted, also the most beautiful, fell violently in love with John Churchill. The intrigue, which followed quickly, came to the knowledge of the King, and probably was the direct cause of Churchill being ordered forthwith to join the English contingent of 6,000 men, under the Duke of Monmouth, who was serving with the French army in Flanders.

Louis XIV. was determined, not merely to humble the pride of the Low Countries, but to annex them to the Crown of France, and it was in the campaign of 1672, known as the Second Dutch War, that Churchill, with the rank of Captain, first drew his sword in the

battles of Europe. His quality as a soldier stood revealed in the siege of Nimeguen, and was sufficiently marked to win the praise of Turenne, one of the greatest Marshals of France at that time, who was in command of the army in Holland. Turenne was the most brilliant strategist in Europe, and owed his first step on the ladder of fortune to that consummate judge of men, Cardinal Richelieu. He was one of the best, as well as one of the bravest, men who ever led troops into action for Louis XIV. Quick in decision, resourceful in emergency, he came to the front by the magic of his sword, and, in an age when compassion did not rule high, he was humane to the wounded, and would even empty his transport waggons rather than leave the rank and file, who had done their best for the honour of France, to die unheeded on the field of battle.

At Maestricht as well as at Nimeguen, Churchill, whom Turenne called "*le bel Anglais*," won distinction, and in a desperate assault, in which he was wounded for the first time, supported Monmouth, who afterwards presented him to Charles II. with the words, "I owe my life to his bravery."<sup>1</sup> Turenne predicted, what he did not live to see, that Churchill would prove a great soldier. His satisfaction at his valour and ability would perhaps have been dashed if he could have foreseen that his young English officer was destined to humiliate the proud armies of France.

If Churchill had a master in the art of war, it was Turenne; he studied the great soldier's tactics, and his own wonderful strategic marches were modelled, like those of Von Moltke in a later age, on Turenne's swift handling of men. In due course Churchill's ability became known to Louis XIV., and—it seems a strange irony—the King, whose power he was destined to

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "*Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough*," vol. i., p. 5 (ed. Bohn).



shatter, appointed him on the 3rd of April, 1674, a Colonel in the French army. In the brunt of the fighting in the Battle of Entzheim and on the Rhine, Churchill bore his part between the years 1674 and 1677. In February, 1678, Charles II. appointed him Colonel of a regiment of foot in the English army, and in doing so the King declared that it was a mark of his "just confidence" in the young soldier's "courage, loyalty, and good conduct." He had spent the winters of those years, when there was no fighting possible, in his old place at the English Court.

It was probably when he was dangling a free foot at Whitehall in 1676-77 that he first met Sarah Jennings, a young lady with "a fury temper and a fairy face," who was in close attendance upon the Duchess of York. At a ball at Whitehall Colonel John Churchill fell in love with the imperious girl of sixteen, who two years later became his wife. The courtship was uneasy, for Sarah Jennings even then was exacting and quick to take offence. It was a case of love at first sight with Churchill, but no siege which he ever conducted in Flanders was so difficult as that of this girl's heart. She was radiantly happy at Court. She had hosts of admirers. Many billets-doux came into her fair hands when she was a Maid of Honour, only to be dismissed with silent disdain. When she was provoked to reply, it was with characteristic vehemence, as this note reveals, a copy of which, written by herself, is at Blenheim: "Your impertinent reflexions of my fine shape would provoke me extremely but that you are miserable, so I am revenged." She possessed the art of holding her admirers at bay, which in itself did her credit, since the perils of a pretty Maid at the lax Court of Whitehall were not slight. She was in no hurry to wed, and if she did so there was no reason that she should marry an almost penniless young officer.

Her own people were opposed to such a match, and so was Sir Winston Churchill.<sup>1</sup> It was perfectly plain to everyone that, with her beauty and vivacity, the young Maid of Honour could marry into the peerage if thus minded. It was equally clear that Colonel John Churchill, the most handsome man of his time, with his stately bearing, his adroit compliments, and his growing reputation as a soldier, might have done likewise.

Both Sarah Jennings and John Churchill had strong wills. They had, equally, great force as well as charm of character; there was little to choose between them on the score of personal ambition.

Moreover, Sarah's fan was quite as effectual, in its way, as Churchill's sword, and though she probably, in her own fashion, returned his affection from the first, it was long before she would admit as much even to herself. The consequence was that she led him a dance; and if he had not possessed, in William of Orange's words, the warmest heart as well as the coldest head in Europe, he would have turned on his heel and relinquished the pursuit of so disdainful a lady. As it was, the more ardent he grew in the avowal of his love, the more capricious and cold became his fair tormentor. It is impossible to resist the conclusion that she played with him in the sheer wantonness of power, like an angler, who knows that the fish at the end of the line, however it may struggle, cannot escape.

Many of the letters which Churchill wrote to Sarah Jennings are still in existence among the archives at Blenheim, and a few—ten in all—of her replies. Churchill's letters—some of them are imperfect, and others are mere notes humbly asking for an assignation—are alive with passion, though more than two centuries have passed. Those of Sarah, on the con-

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 8.

trary, are for the most part alive with scorn, for surely never did a woman flout her lover more. Both packets carry autograph endorsements, written in the lonely, disillusioned old age of the Duchess. Her own contributions to this strangely unequal correspondence are endorsed, "Some coppys of my letters to Mr Churchill." The other packet is inscribed, "My letters to Mr Churchill before I was married." Then follows a request that Grace Ridley, her chief woman in waiting, should be given the letters in order that she might "burn without reading" them. There is another pathetic endorsement which states that the Duchess had herself read over the love letters of her youth in the year 1736, and then follows, in the trembling hand of extreme old age, the words which she wrote the year before she died: "Read over in 1743, desiring to burn them, but I could not doe it." So they have come down to us, since Grace Ridley either never saw them or feared to commit them to the flames.

Nobody cared much about spelling in those days; indeed, the art of orthography had scarcely emerged from the experimental stage, and a great many people, especially if they were lovers writing in hot haste, were not less careless as to dates. A few were evidently written shortly after they were secretly married, and one is inscribed: "I believe I was married when this letter was writt, but it was not known to any but the Duchess (of York)." Another—it is a mere fragment—has evidently strayed into the collection from a later period, and cannot have been written earlier than 1689, since it runs:

"Wherever you are, whilst I have life, my soul shall follow you, my ever dear Lord Marl, and wherever I am I should only kill the time wishing for night that I may sleep and hope the next day to hear from you."

Churchill was created Earl of Marlborough in 1689, and it seems likely that this tender message was written to him when he was in charge of the English troops in Flanders that year. He kept that letter, but, in obedience to Sarah's desire, and also perhaps as a measure of precaution—for she was strangely unguarded and outspoken about public affairs—the great soldier destroyed, as soon as he had read, nearly all the letters which he received from his wife during his campaigns. He seems to have destroyed her letters even during his courtship, and small wonder, if most of them were couched in the terms of the few that remain.

She followed a more excellent way, for her scorn of him was all on the surface. No woman with any claim to a heart could have failed to put such mis-sives under lock and key. There is scarcely a hint on either side of the splendid Court, in which both of them even then played so brilliant a part; for like lovers in all ages, they narrowed the world down to themselves. He says nothing of his military aspirations; she is quite silent about the homage she met at Whitehall and the ogling glances of the Duke of York. He protests his affection in terms which might have moved a stone. She bridles with contempt, and affects not to believe a word of it.

He writes: " My soull, I goe with the heaviest hart than ever man did, for by all that is good I love you with all my hart, and I am shure that as long as I live you shall have no just reason to believe the contrary. If you are unkind, I love so well that I cannot live, for you are my life, my soull, my all that I hold dear in this world; therefore do not make so ungratfull a returne as not to writt. If you have charety you will not only writt, but you will writt kindly, for it is on you that depends the quiett of my soull. Had I fittinge wordes to express my love, it would not then be in your power to refuse what I beg, with tears in

my eyes, that you would love me as I, by heavens, doe you."

She was relentless, and so we find her writing :

" If it were true that you have that passion for me, which you say you have, you would find out some way to make yourself hapy. It is in you power, therefore press me no more to see you, since 'tis what I cannot in honour allow of, and if I have done too much, be so just to consider who was the cause of it."

He was far too much in love to take a rebuff, though it is plain that he winced at her coldness :

" Yours last night found me soe sicke that I thogte I should have died, and I have now so exssessive a headeake that I should not stire out all day but that the Dut has sent me word that the Duke will see me this afternoon, so thate att night I shall have the happiness to see you in the drawenige roome. I cannot remember what itt is I sayde to you that you take so ill. Ah, my soull, did you love so well as I, you could never have refused my letter so barbarously as you did, for if reason had beed you doe it, love would never have permitted itt. But I will complain no more of it, but hope time and the truth of my love will make you love better."

He writes again when relations between them were beginning to be strained for reasons which will presently be shown :

" To showe you how unreasonable you are in accusing me, I dare swaire you yourself will owne that your going from me in the Dutchess' drawing-room did show as mutche contempte as was possible. I may grive at it, but I will no more complain when you do it for I supose tis what pleases your youmer [humour]. I can't imagine what you ment by your saying I lafed at you at the Duke's side, for I was so fare from that, had it not bene for shame, I could have cried, and for being in hast to go to the Parke after you went, I stooede nere a quarter of an hour I belive without knoweing what I did, although att Whitehall you told

me I should not come yett, I walked twice to the Duke's bakestaires, but ther was no Mrs Mowdie and when I went to my lady Duchess' I would not go the same way they did, but came again downe the bakestaires, and when I went away I did not go in my cheire, but made it follow me, because I would see if ther was anny light in your chamber, but I saw none. Could you see my heart you would not be so cruell as to say I do not love you, for by all that is good I love you and only you. If I may have the hapyness of seeing you tonight pray let me knowe and believe that I am never truly pleased than when I am with you."

But the lady was cold, and, though Churchill did not know it, he was courting a rebuff. He complains that she had beaten a retreat:

" It was unkind of you to goe away last night sence you knew that I camme for noe other purpose but to have the joye of seeing you, but I will not belive it was for want of love, for you are all goodness, the thought of which makes me love you above my own soull. If you shall be in the draweing-roome tonight, send me word att what hour, so that I may order itt soe to be ther att the same time. I am now in my chamber, and will stay ther as long as I can in hopes I may hear from you."

Sarah had her own reasons for leaving the drawing-room when Churchill entered. There was another lady in the case, and she was jealous. Sir Winston Churchill looked coldly at his son's courtship of the girl who, on contemporary evidence, was the prettiest of the Duchess's Maids of Honour. He wanted his clever, handsome son to make a better match, and he showed him how he might do so if he would consent to turn his thoughts to Catherine, only child and heiress of Sir John Sedley. She could not hold a candle to Sarah Jennings in point of good looks, but she had wit and was wealthy. Churchill wavered. He knew the value of money; indeed, he was always

fond of it; and Sarah was quick to detect his change of attitude, and began to suspect he was playing with her. She grew furious, not only because she felt herself slighted, but also because she felt for the first time how much she loved him. Instantly she took the high hand with her lover :

“ As for seeing you I am resolved I never will in private nor in publick if I could help it. As for the last I fear it will be some time before I can order soe as to be out of your way of seeing me. But surely you must confess that you have been the falsest creature upon earth to me. I must own that I believe that I shall suffer a great deal of trouble, but I will bear it, and give God thanks, though too late I see my error.”

There is a touch of pathos in that letter, for it reveals a wounded heart through all her anger. She looked forward to a “ great deal of trouble,” but that did not alter her determination. She would not be trifled with, even if she had to renounce the most attractive courtier at Whitehall. She thought of flying to Paris to her sister, Lady Hamilton,<sup>1</sup> to get out of the way of the “ falsest creature upon Earth,” and probably she would have done so at the peril of her position at Court if her lover had not surrendered at discretion. He protested that his “ heart was redy to breake ” because of her “ unkind, indiferant letter.” He loved her, he added, to distraction, and would do so as long as he lived ; but “ if you command me death, I will dye.” If he had hesitated before, he was thoroughly in earnest now, and all thoughts of plain Catherine Sedley and the fortune she would bring were thrown to the winds. His letters make this plain :

“ Itt is not reasonable that you should have a doute, but that I love you above all expression,

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, “ Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. i., p. 9.

which by Heaven I doe. Itt is not possible to lett you see your power more than my obedience to your commands of leaving you, when my tyrant hart rakes me to make me disobaye. But itt were much better it should breake then to displease you. I will not, derest, aske or hope to hear from you, unless your charety pittys me, and will so fare plead for me as to tell you that a man dyeing for you maye hope that you will be soe kind as to make a distinction betwixt him and the rest of his sex. I doe love and adore you with all my harte and soull soe much that by all that is good I doe and ever will be better pleased with your hapyness than my one. . . . I will not dare to expecte more favour than you shall think fitt to give but could you ever love me I think the hapyness would be so greatt that it would make me imortall."

Sarah kept her affections well in leash. She was incredulous and scornful:

"I am as little satisfied with this letre as I have been with many others, for I said all you will say is only to amaze me and to make me think you have a passion for me, when in reality ther is no such thing. You have reason to think it strang that I write to you after my last, when I professed that I would never write or speak to you more; but as you know how much kindnesses I had from you, you can't wonder or blame me if I try you once more to hear what you can say for your justification; but this I must warn you of, that you don't hold (designs) as you have don allways, and to keep me from answering of you, and yourself from saying what I expect from you, for if you goe on in that manner I will leave you that moment and never hear you speak more whilst I have life. Therefore pray consider if with honour to me and satisfaction to yourself I can see you; for if it is only to repeat those things which you said so often I shall think you the worst of men and the most ungratefull, and 'tis to no purpose to imagin that I will be made rediculous in the world when it is in your power to make me otherwise."



Churchill seems at this point to have been so much in despair that he tried to find an ally in Mistress Mowdie, a waiting-woman at the elbow of his fair enslaver:

"Your mistresses usidge to me is so barbarus that shure she must be the worst woman in the world or she could not be thus ill-natured. I have sent a letter which I disier you will give her. Itt is very reasonable for her to take itt, because itt will be then in her power never to be trobled with me more if she pleases. I doe love her with all my soull, but will not trouble her, for if I cannot have her love I shall despise her pittty. For the sake of what she has already done lett her read my letter and answer itt, and not use me like footemen."

The notes which follow show that Mistress Sarah still kept him at a distance, and trifled with his professions of love:

"I would have been mutch kinder in you, if you had been pleased to have been soe good natured to have found time to have writ to me yesterday, especially sence you are resolved not to apeare when I might see you. But I am resolved to take nothing ille but to be your slave as long as I live, and soe to think all things well that you doe."

That was abject enough—a veritable surrender at discretion.

Apparently the lady, when he entered the drawing-room again, took refuge in flight. He writes:

"When I left my father last night a purpose to com and speake with you I did not belive that you would have been soe unkind as to have gone a way the minit I caime in feareing that I might else have spoake to you, which indeed I should have been very glad to have done. I beg you will give me leave to see you this night att what hour you please. Pray let me hear from you and if you doe not think me impertinent for askeing I should be glade to know what maid you goe away."

The reason why she went away is plain enough. Catherine Sedley, she imagined, still stood between them. In other words, she thought that her lover had two strings to his bow, and, though she was receiving a good deal of attention herself from other gallants, she disdained to alter her attitude to Churchill until her suspicions were set at rest. He seems to have bombarded her with letters to very little purpose, and the more he protested his affection, the less was she inclined to believe him. He thought that, if she would grant him an interview, it would not be difficult to convince her that, in spite of Sir Winston, he had definitely renounced all pretensions to the hand of the ugly heiress. But Sarah, though she was dying to know the truth, continued to hold him at arm's length, and could not restrain her pen, which she continued to dip in scornful ink:

“I have don nothing to deserve such a kind of letter as you have writ to me, and therefore I don't know what answer to give, but I find that you have a very ill opinion of me, and therefore I cannot help being angray with myself for having had so good a one of you, for if I had as little love as yourself, I have been told enough about you to make me hate you, and then I believe I should be more hapy than I am like to be now. However if you can be so well contented never to see me, as I think you can by what you say, I will believe you that I have other people, and after you are satisfied that I have not break my word you shall have it in your power to see me or not; and if you are contented without it I shall be extremely pleased.”

It is almost a wonder, after the stinging words with which that letter closes, that he pursued her farther. All things are possible, however, to one hopelessly head-over-ears in love; and, though he must have winced, he caught like a drowning man at

a straw, and braved the ordeal of an interview, so petulantly conceded. If he was so eloquent on paper, it is easy to imagine he was resistless in speech in pleading a cause that was so bound up with his happiness. He asked a week to set her lingering fears at rest, and apparently gained it; and after that, though her mood on occasion was fickle, their courtship, no longer vexed by parental interference and tittle-tattle, though still somewhat uneasy, escaped the danger zone, and followed—afar off, perhaps—conventional lines. They were not free to do exactly as they pleased, for Mistress Jennings was in close attendance upon the Duchess of York, and Colonel Churchill had to study the whims of the Duke.

They kept their engagement dark for reasons which seemed sufficient to themselves, and did not reveal to the world the relations in which they stood to each other. Mary of Modena was in the secret, and, from occult allusions in other letters, it is clear that she did her best to advance the interests of the lively Maid of Honour, who never concealed, and perhaps at times paraded, her sturdy attachment to the Protestant faith. The distractions and late hours of the Court taxed the strength of Mistress Sarah, and possibly the tender passion had something to do with her ailments, as well as with the "excessive headakes" to which her lover more than once alludes in his letters. The lady's pretty gift of sarcasm—it grew pronounced in later years—was already in evidence:

"At four o'clock I would see you, but that would hinder you from seeing the play, which I fear would be a great affliction to you and increase the pain in your head which would be out of anybody's power to ease till the next new play. Therefore pray consider, and without any compliment to me send word

if you can come to me without any prejudice to your health."

He writes :

" I was last night at the balle in hopes to have siene what I love above my own soull, but I was not soe hapy for I could see you nowhere, soe that I did not stay above an hour. I would have writt sooner, but I was afraid you went to bed so laite itt would disturb you. Pray see which of those two pupies you like best and that kepe. . . . If you give itt warme milke itt will not dye. Pray let me hear from you and at what time you will be so kind as to lett me com to-night. Pray if you have nothing to doe, lett 8 be the laitest, for I never am trully hapy but when I am with you."

Churchill seems to have had a lingering fear that family opposition—this time on the part of the lady's friends—might still divide them, and this drew from her the note which follows :

" If your intentions are honourable and what I have reason to expect, you need not fear my sister's coming can make any change in me, or that it is in the power of anyone to alter me but yourself, and I am at this time satisfied that you will never doe anything out of reason, which you must doe if you ever are unjust to me."

They met at Court, they met at the Opera, and Mary of Modena, who followed the courtship with amused eyes, put no obstacle in the way of less guarded interviews. Churchill was so much enamoured that his health suffered; he declared that he was going off in a consumption, a confession which made his friends smile, for he looked in the pink of condition. Like all lovers, he was tenderly solicitous about Mistress Sarah's health. So we find him warning her not to imperil it :

" I hope you was soe wise as to value your one helth before your duty to the Dutchess, so that you did not walk with her att five this morning."

Mary of Modena disconcerted the Court on occasion by going abroad in the early morning, a habit which was embarrassing to Maids of Honour, tired out with the late hours which were customary, even when Charles II. was King. Churchill would go night after night to the Opera, in the hope of catching a glimpse of his enchantress; and his letters make it plain that he often went in vain, for Mary of Modena, though fond of amusements, was a capricious Princess, and apt to change her plans at a moment's notice.

There is no need to add any more protests of affection, nor is it necessary to add any more of Mistress Sarah's notes in reply, through which the east wind blew quite as much as the south. Let it be remembered, however, in justice to her, that she seems only to have copied her own notes when she was nettled, and that Churchill, who was then and always compliant to her whims, burnt her letters, and amongst them, doubtless, many that were in a tender strain. He loved her from first to last with passionate devotion, and she was worthy of the devotion she inspired, in spite of her petulant, gain-saying moods and, on occasion, her needlessly brusque and uncompromising speech.

There is no exact record of their marriage, which took place privately in the presence of Mary of Modena in the spring of 1678.<sup>1</sup> But so secret were the nuptials that no one at the moment seems to have suspected they had taken place. Colonel Churchill was sent as an Envoy to the Prince of Orange shortly afterwards, and there is a letter at Blenheim addressed to his wife under her maiden name. Mary of Modena, who was the soul of kindness, made substantial presents to the bride. Shortly after the ceremony Churchill took his young wife to his old home in

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 9.

Dorsetshire, and there she remained, whilst he was in waiting on the Duke of York in Holland.

Her last days at Court had been troubled by a poor relation. This was Edward Griffith, of St. Albans, who had married her sister Barbara. This lady died in the year of Sarah's marriage, leaving but one child, who survived her only a few months. Meanwhile Edward Griffith, in spite of his sister-in-law's aversion to him, was ambitious to gain a footing at Court. Mistress Sarah gives an amusing picture of him dancing attendance on her at Whitehall, and declares that she is more weary of the man than of anything in the world:

"He has learnt French ever since my sister dyed, and thinks thar is nobody understands more nor pronounces it better than himself. I am in amazement every time I see him how my poor sister could have such a passion for him. Then he is soe ill-bred, and fancies himself such a wit and makes such a noise from morning to night that, as my mother says, he turns my head, I beleeve I had not had his company but that he wants money. I cannot imagin how he will doe to live, being of a humor that makes him uncapable of anything but spending. I confess I have not much concern for him and all I desire is that he may not spind all at St Albans without paying the interest which he will doe if he is not prevented I do really beleeve, and then the poor child will be undon."<sup>1</sup>

The allusion is to the small sum which Barbara Griffith had left in trust for her little girl; but the "poor child" died the year after her mother, and Edward Griffith, by persistently hanging on to his sister-in-law, ultimately became secretary to Prince George of Denmark, and Comptroller of the Board of Green Cloth in the reign of Queen Anne.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BEGINNINGS OF POWER

THE great world had not stood still in the years when John Churchill was winning his spurs in the Low Countries, and Sarah Jennings was engaged in the conquest of hearts at Whitehall. Churchill first set foot in Flanders in 1672. That year was an eventful one in the lives of two of the monarchs whom he afterwards served. It witnessed the invasion of Holland by France, and the proclamation of William of Orange, as Stadtholder, at the age of twenty-two. It was the year, also, when the Duke of York was publicly received into the Roman Catholic Church, of which he had secretly been an adherent for some time. The accession of William of Orange to power meant the advent of a new personal force, not only in the councils of Holland, but in the affairs of Europe. The open avowal of Roman Catholicism by the Duke of York, which was followed, almost within twelve months, by his marriage to the Roman Catholic Princess Mary of Modena, imperilled the Protestant Succession in England, and led to the passing of the Test Act in 1673, which forced the King's brother to relinquish the post of Lord High Admiral.

The Princess Mary and the Princess Anne, the daughters of James, Duke of York, by his first marriage, stood in direct succession to the throne, and were therefore, by the express command of Charles II., brought up in the Protestant faith. The Duke of York, who in his own fashion was a sincere Roman

Catholic, did not relish this, but was compelled to acquiesce, and his submission was rendered less difficult by his small concern for either of his daughters. They both in consequence fell under the influence of Dr. Henry Compton, Bishop of London, who was as ardent and aggressive a Protestant as their father was a Roman Catholic. England just then was aiding and abetting France in the war with Holland, but peace was concluded in 1674. Three years later, at the instance of Charles II., the hand of the Princess Mary, a mere girl of fifteen, was given in marriage to a man whom her father both feared and detested, William of Orange, the bold, taciturn, ungainly-looking Prince whom the Maids of Honour at Whitehall nicknamed the "Dutch Monster."

There were two other marriages that concerned John Churchill and Sarah Jennings more closely than the marriage of the Princess Mary. The first was that of Sidney Godolphin, Groom of the Bedchamber to the King, with Mistress Blague, Maid of Honour to Catherine of Braganza. They were married in 1675, and their courtship, like that of John Churchill, was encouraged by the vivacious Mary of Modena, who was in truth somewhat of a matchmaker. Godolphin was one of the earliest and most constant of Churchill's friends, and his young wife, who was renowned for her wit and beauty and goodness, was a friend of Sarah Jennings. She lived only a few months after Sarah's marriage, though she lives for all time in the pages of John Evelyn. The other marriage, in 1679, was that of Sarah's sister, Frances Lady Hamilton, with Dick Talbot, who afterwards became Earl and, eventually, titular Duke of Tyrconnel.

Churchill, a few months after his marriage in 1678, was sent by Charles II. on a mission to William of Orange, for the King at that time professed to be



anxious to renew the Triple Alliance. The outcome of these negotiations was that England sent troops to support Holland against France, and Churchill was appointed to the command of a brigade. But the Peace of Nimeguen warded off hostilities, and he returned to England to watch events and to resume attendance on the Duke of York, who by this time was perhaps the most unpopular man in the country. The proceedings in Parliament reflected the temper of the nation. In the autumn of 1678 an Act had been passed for "Disabling Papists from sitting in either House of Parliament," and only by two votes was an exception made in favour of the Duke of York. In the spring of the following year—it is significant that a General Election had taken place in the interval—the House of Commons, believing that both the religion and the liberties of the country would be imperilled by the Duke of York's accession, introduced the Exclusion Bill, which, if it had become law, would have annulled his claims to the throne. It passed the Commons in 1680, but the Lords threw out the measure, and the King, taking his courage in both hands, declared that he would veto any repetition of a similar proposal.

The nation had set its heart on the Duke of Monmouth, and an elaborate attempt was made to prove that Charles had been secretly married to Lucy Walters. Meanwhile the Duke of York had been ordered abroad by the King in 1679, and took up his residence at The Hague. Colonel Churchill and his bride went to Holland in attendance. Charles saw that his brother's presence at Court increased the resentment of the people. The Duke of York was haughty, suspicious, shifty; he distrusted nearly everyone; but Churchill, young as he was, somehow possessed his confidence to a singular degree. The Duke knew that he had given the young officer his

first chance in life; he recognized not merely his charm as a man, but his ability as a soldier, and did everything in his power to attach him to himself, in view of all that might happen, as the King's health was already uncertain. Churchill on his part was not unmindful of what he owed the Duke, though he saw clearly enough that his arrogant temper and his uncompromising attitude on religion were likely to wreck his career.

The Duke quickly grew restless at The Hague, for he had nothing in common with William of Orange, who seized the opportunity to study the character of his father-in-law and also that of Churchill. William was a shrewd judge of men; he knew what was happening in England, and had already a wide grasp of affairs, though for the moment he thought it politic to cloak and dissemble all that was in his mind. Suddenly Charles fell ill, and James, in the winter of 1679, seized the opportunity to come to Whitehall. Churchill, who had accompanied him to England, was sent by Charles on a mission to the French Court; for the King, in spite of his parade of friendship with Holland, was still in secret league with Louis XIV. The Duke, once in England, was anxious to remain, but his unpopularity was at its height, and Charles, piqued and in perplexity, sent him across the Tweed to administer the affairs of Scotland.

Churchill, having fulfilled his mission in Paris, followed his master to Scotland, reaching Edinburgh in December, 1679. The Duke beguiled his enforced retirement from Whitehall by hunting, playing billiards, and learning a game which was new to him, and which he called "goffe." Mary of Modena, at Edinburgh, found diversion in plays, balls, and card-parties, and life went pleasantly enough with young Mrs. Churchill in a round of entertainments and receptions.

The relations between the royal brothers were not strained, though Charles always played for his own hand, and was beyond all else a man of the world. He saw the wisdom of keeping his brother at arm's length, or at any rate hoodwinking the nation into thinking that he did so. But the Duke was graciously allowed to come on an occasional visit to the English Court, and Churchill always accompanied him. It was on one such occasion, in 1682, that John Churchill, on the recommendation of the Duke of York, was created Baron Churchill of Aymouth, in the Scottish peerage.<sup>1</sup>

In the following year the Princess Anne married Prince George of Denmark, an event which gave a dramatic turn to the fortunes of the newly-ennobled Lady Churchill, who was still in the bloom of her youth, for she was not yet three-and-twenty. The Princess Anne was uneasy in the company of her father. He was not the man to inspire affection, even in his own children. Between them lay the barrier of religion, and the Duke was annoyed at his own inability to weaken his daughter's allegiance to Protestantism, even though he called to his aid Mary of Modena, to whom Anne was more attached. Bishop Compton had done his work well. The Princess Anne was already—and ever afterwards remained—a loyal, if somewhat narrow-minded, adherent of the Church of England.

All the influences of the Court ran the other way. The King would have thrown off the mask, and avowed himself a Roman Catholic, if he had not had to reckon with the Protestant temper of his subjects. As it was, he faced both ways. The Duke of York was a Roman Catholic of harsh and persecuting instincts, who, whilst punctilious in the observance of the rites of the Church, went his own way, though

Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 15

not so openly, in pursuit of pleasure. It is remarkable that so young a Princess as Anne, with the example of her father and uncle continually before her, should have been, with all her short-comings, and they were many, a sincerely religious Protestant. Lady Churchill, who was henceforth to play a great part in the development of her character, as well as in the story of the reign, was also an ardent Protestant, though her attachment to the Church was more political than religious. Religion from first to last never entered deeply into her life. The clergy represented to her a sort of moral police, and she liked them best when they were complacent to people of quality, and reserved their stern admonitions for the lower orders. She was an individualist of the most uncompromising type, and allowed no man, whether priest or prelate, to claim ascendancy over her. Her religion was entirely her own concern, though it must be admitted that in certain moods her attitude was one of revolt, and her energetic utterances were frankly pagan.

At three-and-twenty most people do not take religion seriously, and Lady Churchill, who did not set up either as a saint or an idealist, was too bent on pleasure in a perfectly legitimate fashion, and too ambitious in the political sense, to trouble her head with problems of conscience or with questions of faith. But she had even then the passion for liberty, alike in religion and in politics; and if she believed anything, it was that the Whigs were the best champions of both. The Princess Anne only partially shared Lady Churchill's political enthusiasm, but they were of one mind in religion, even though the one took matters of faith more seriously than the other.

In all this Lady Churchill was in complete agreement with her lord. He was more ardently attached, however, than she to the Church of England; and

though the Duke of York laboured hard for his conversion, the one point on which he absolutely refused to follow his master was submission to the Church of Rome. Churchill, by temperament and conviction, was a religious man. There were times in his life when religious motives and authority appear to have been relaxed. But looking at his career broadly, in the light of the age in which he lived, and of the temptations to which he was exposed, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that he was a high-principled man in a sense which was not common in that age.

If the Princess Anne's loyalty to the Protestant Church is remarkable, in view of the surroundings of her youth, not less surprising is the confidence which the Duke of York, as a fervid Catholic, reposed in Churchill, who was emphatically an Anglican of the school which had the least sympathy with Rome. George of Denmark was a weak, amiable, and shallow Prince, but a Protestant; the Princess Anne, in her marriage with him, was not therefore ruffled by the religious question.

Mary of Modena was so far childless, and the Princess Anne, whose succession to the throne was by no means a remote contingency, received a revenue in accordance with her rank. Her first request—it was addressed to Mary of Modena—was that her stepmother would release Lady Churchill from her service. The Duchess consented, and thus began one of the most memorable chapters in English history. Appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Denmark in 1683, Lady Churchill identified herself from the outset with the fortunes of her mistress. Anne, like other people devoid of any real strength of character, had a touch of obstinacy. She was prosaic, well-intentioned, a great stickler for etiquette, narrow-minded but warm-hearted, and she possessed

a lively conscience and a keen sense of public duty, both of which qualities were lacking in Charles II. and the Duke of York. She did not give her confidence easily, but when given it was without stint, and, being weak and vacillating in many directions, she was glad to lean on so resolute and capable a woman as Lady Churchill, who rapidly acquired ascendancy over her through sheer force of character. Here the latter's own words may be cited :

" The beginning of the Princess's kindness for me had a much earlier date than my entrance into her service. My promotion to this honour was wholly owing to impressions she had before received to my advantage; we had used to play together when she was a child, and she even then expressed a particular fondness for me. This inclination increased with our years. I was often at Court, and the Princess always distinguished me, by the pleasure she took to honour me, preferably to others, with her conversation and confidence."<sup>1</sup>

It was natural that Anne, chilled by the Countess of Clarendon, who " looked like a mad woman and talked like a scholar,"<sup>2</sup> should seize the opportunity of her marriage to beg her father to allow her to add to her household the lively, sympathetic, outspoken friend of her girlhood.

Lady Churchill never talked like a scholar, even if some of her critics were inclined to think there were occasions when she acted like a mad woman. Even that charge cannot be laid against her until her long and honourable association with Anne, as Princess and Queen, had been broken by backstair intrigue, and was drawing to its troubled and dramatic close. She had radiant spirits, clean-cut convictions, generous impulses, a real grasp of public affairs, even at that time, a quick temper, and, what is vastly inconvenient in a Court, a passion for calling a spade a spade.

<sup>1</sup> " Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," pp. 9, 10. (London, 1742.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

"Young as I was," was her confession, written in old age, "when I first became high favourite I laid it down for a maxim that flattery was falsehood to my trust, and that I did not deserve so much favour if I could not venture the loss of it by speaking the truth."<sup>1</sup>

Royal personages, with rare exceptions, do not suffer the word of admonition, unless it is discreetly accompanied by compliments, which rob it of its sting. Lady Churchill was not given to compliments. She was sincere and devoted, but she did not mince her words. She flouted the notion that subjects should be "awfully obedient"—the phrase is her own—and servants, even of Kings and Princes, "blindly obsequious." In other words, she magnified her office from the start, and was too much inclined to play the part of the candid friend.

The riotous reign of Charles was drawing to a close. He had sown his wild-oats, and was beginning to reap the harvest in broken health. No one could tell what would happen; and if Monmouth's rebellion had not been crushed with the help of Marlborough's sword, the course of English history might have been altered. A non-committal policy was in the air; statesmen were playing a waiting game, and meanwhile the Princess of Denmark, with her little retinue, was living in the shade, wellnigh a negligible quantity.

Prince George of Denmark was a man of thirty when he married the Princess Anne, a girl of eighteen, on the 18th of July, 1683. He was a Lutheran, and brother of the reigning King, Christian V. He was a harmless, shallow, well-intentioned, self-indulgent Prince, though free from the vices of Charles and James. If Anne had been free to follow her heart, she would probably have married the Earl of Mulgrave, for whom as a girl she had a great predilection.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

That, of course, was out of the question, and the first serious proposal for her hand was made by Prince George of Hanover, afterwards George I. His pretensions were quickly dismissed, and, when George of Denmark afterwards came upon the scene, Charles II., swift to see that such a marriage would please the Protestant temper of the people, declared that he considered it "very suitable." The Duke of York, who had to bow to the King's will, made it plain that he was not too well pleased. He did not oppose it, but contented himself by saying that he had "little encouragement in the conduct of the Prince of Orange to marry another daughter in the same interest." Both the royal brothers believed that the marriage would please the nation, and were pleased at the public rejoicings.

Prince George had a handsome, vacant face, homely, rather awkward manners, spoke French with a bad accent, and carried himself with no distinction. He came to England with a reputation for valour, but he never had the opportunity of showing whether he deserved it. He was the father of many children, all of whom died young, though one of them, the bright and promising little Duke of Gloucester, lived long enough to cheer the lonely closing years of William III., and to be regarded by the English people as the hope of the nation. Prince George himself lived fifteen years in England, and never awakened a particle of enthusiasm.

Charles II. was a shrewd judge of men, and he quickly took the measure of his niece's husband. "I have tried Prince George sober, and I have tried him drunk," was the King's cynical verdict, "and drunk or sober there is nothing in him." But he had many points in common with the Princess Anne. He shared her fondness for good living, her punctilious regard for etiquette, and, though not her equal in



sagacity, he at least looked at life in the same practical, unimaginative way. Moreover, as a husband he was affectionate and attentive; and, as he had little ambition except to be amused in directions that did not strain the loyalty of his wife, life went very well with him, both when Anne was Princess and when she was Queen. He died in 1708, one of the most glorious years of her short but splendid reign; and if the nation did not mourn him much, the Queen did, and so did the Churchills, whom to the end of his life he steadily supported amid all the intrigues of the Court.

In 1683 Colonel Lord Churchill, who was just then on active service at home and abroad, was well pleased that his young wife should be chosen by the Princess of Denmark as Lady of the Bedchamber; indeed, he was supposed to have exerted himself to have obtained that appointment for her. It kept her in touch with the Court, and therefore at the centre of affairs, whilst it shielded her, as a young married woman, from some of its temptations; for the quiet household of the Princess at the Cockpit differed widely, though it was only on the other side of the street, from the wild licence of Whitehall. There was nothing brilliant in the prospects of the Princess when Lady Churchill entered her service. Charles was still on the throne, and though her father, the Duke of York, stood next in succession, he was so unpopular that many people wondered whether he would ever succeed to the crown. The Princess of Orange stood next, and, as she was young and vigorous, no one imagined that her union with William would be childless.

The Princess Anne had seen comparatively little of the world, but as a child she had been under the charge of her grandmother, Queen Henrietta Maria, in France, and shortly before her marriage had been invited by her sister to The Hague, and had shared her father's exile in Brussels for a brief period.

That exhausted her knowledge of Europe, though doubtless Prince George tried to interest her in Denmark.

The royal household, when Lady Churchill entered it, was, on her own showing, "oddly composed." She alone represented the unfettered choice of the Princess, and the ruling spirit was the Countess of Clarendon, wife of Henry Hyde, second Earl, and aunt by marriage to the Princess. This lady was not at all to Anne's mind, and, though unable to dismiss her, she grew restive. The Countess, on the score of her years and her relationship, was inclined to magnify her office, and Anne resented her interminable harangues. But changes were in the air, for before two years were over Charles II. suddenly fell ill, to the consternation of the Court, and died on the morning of the 6th of February, 1685, and the Duke of York, at the age of fifty-two, came to the throne as James II.

It was a matter of surprise that his reign began so quietly; but England, though it did not love him, was not in the mood for revolt. He had the good sense to conciliate his subjects by an adroit and reassuring speech, in the course of which he declared that he would maintain the existing order in Church and State, and ridiculed the notion that he was fond of arbitrary power. The people, though not without misgivings, took him at his word. Anyhow, they reasoned, since the King was comparatively old, that the reign would not be long; and as his young Catholic consort had now been married twelve years, and was childless, there was no reason to think that the Protestant Succession was imperilled, since both of James's daughters by Anne Hyde were wedded to Princes of the Protestant faith. The people had, in truth, set their heart upon Mary, Princess of Orange; and, though they knew little of her strong, resourceful

husband, they realized that so long as she lived the common welfare was secure.

One of the minor results of the new reign was that the King promptly sent his brother-in-law to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant, an act which relieved the Princess of Denmark of the uneasy presence in her household of the Countess of Clarendon.

"The Princess," states Lady Churchill, "received a sensible joy from this event; not only as it released her from a person very disagreeable to her, but as it gave her an opportunity of promoting me to be first Lady of the Bedchamber; which she immediately did, with a satisfaction to herself which was not to be concealed."<sup>1</sup>

It was in this way that, from 1685 onwards, Sarah, Lady Churchill, became the ruling spirit in the household of Anne, alike in the shadowed years of her life as Princess and the splendid years of her life as Queen. Lady Marlborough's fortunes advanced with those of her royal mistress, and she retained her great position for exactly a quarter of a century.

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 15.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHURCHILLS AND THE REVOLUTION

THE reign of James II., short though it was, was long enough to tax the patience and loyalty of his subjects to the breaking-point. The King played his cards uncommonly badly; and if he had deliberately set out to thwart the wishes of his people, he could not have succeeded better, though he desired to propitiate them in his own fashion. Nobody was righteous overmuch in those days. The Puritan fervour, which was not satisfied without an appeal to the sword in the days of Charles I., had long since spent its force. But the nation was Protestant, and sensitive, moreover, in regard to its political rights. James was a Papist, open and unabashed, and, like all converts, inclined to overdo his part. He was an autocrat also in the political sphere, of harsh and unaccommodating temper.

"Never fear for me, James; no one will kill me to make you King," was the jocular remark of Charles II. when his brother thought he was running needless risks. Charles knew perfectly well that, though he tried the allegiance of his people in more directions than one, they liked him, and that his life was secure, against even the most cracked-brain assassin, through the unpopularity of the Duke of York. To kill Charles to make James King would be to get out of the frying-pan into the fire, and realizing this, in his easy, nonchalant manner, the merry monarch drank the cup of pleasure to the last, un-

ruffled and unmolested, and died as he had lived, though not without a secret surrender to Rome.

James had most of his brother's vices, and scarcely any of his virtues. Even his children feared him and kept out of his way. The Princess of Orange was glad that the sea divided her from her father, and the Princess of Denmark made it perfectly clear that she preferred her quiet life at the Cockpit to the splendour of Whitehall. As the Princess of Orange had no children, and the new Queen, Mary of Modena, was so far in the same case, courtiers who took long views suddenly became interested in Anne. It was not a remote contingency, even when James began to reign, that this demure, home-loving Princess, though treated cavalierly by her father, might come to the throne. But the great bulk of the nation did not look so far; they had set their heart on the accession, in due time, of Mary; and, though there was a sharp division of opinion concerning her strong, taciturn consort, the common notion was that he would play a subsidiary part when his fair and vivacious wife came to the throne.

The knowledge that James II. did not exactly love his son-in-law told in William's favour, for nobody loved the King, though many people feared him. Moreover, all calculations might be upset, for Mary of Modena might still have a child, though, as the reign ran its short, uneasy course, that grew unlikely. William of Orange kept a keen eye on English affairs; he was bound to do so, for Mary was next in succession. Moreover, he was a long-headed man, conscious of his own powers, and of great ambition, and not the Prince, when the occasion arose, to drop into the insignificant position of his easy brother-in-law, George of Denmark. He had already made up his mind that if he came to England it would be on other terms.

It was once said of James II. that he was the only Stuart who did not know how to be gracious. He lacked the charm, the ability, and the tact, of Charles; and though he gave more attention to affairs of State, and threw more conscience into the discharge of the duties of the Crown, he never won the confidence of either the classes or the masses. It is certain he did not understand the hold which the Church of England had upon his subjects, and, living in a little clique of courtiers and priests, who flattered him to the top of his bent, he had no idea of the passionate and half-fanatical fear of Rome which filled the public mind. If the King had listened to the counsels of the old Roman Catholic nobility of England, instead of to Father Petre and perfervid new converts to Rome in high places, a more moderate policy would have been adopted. As it was, James set everybody by the ears, and prepared the way for his own downfall. There is no need to dwell upon the measures which brought it about—his harsh treatment of the popular favourite Monmouth, the Declaration of Indulgence, the trial and acquittal of the Seven Bishops who refused to read that manifesto, and other mistakes scarcely less glaring, which brought the nation to the verge of revolt.

Affairs grew suddenly critical in the summer of 1688, when certain great nobles, and other men of light and leading in the land, petitioned William of Orange to bring over an army and secure the liberties of the English people. The Prince took time to consider so extraordinary an appeal. It reached him in the beginning of July, but before September was ended he issued his famous Declaration. In it he drew up an indictment of his father-in-law's conduct on the throne, and ended by declaring that, as consort of Mary, he was coming with an army, not of invasion, but to uphold the rights of Parliament,

by whose free and unfettered decision, whatever that might be, he would abide.

James, weak and petulant, was astounded at such tidings. He watched the weathercock, which still exists on the roof of Whitehall, with anxious eyes, and, gaining a brief respite by the wind, which did not favour the Dutch, made a few concessions in haste, which came too late. A child had been born that summer, on the 10th of June, to Mary of Modena—the child who lives in history as the Old Pretender, though he was the legitimate son of the reigning King. The autumn was full of wild alarm, plot and counterplot, subterfuge and irresolution; but on the 5th of November William of Orange, with his trusty Dutch troops, landed at Torbay. A month later James secretly sent the Queen and her infant abroad, William of Orange meanwhile steadily advancing on London, amid the growing plaudits of the people; and before the year was out the King had taken refuge in ignominious flight, and William of Orange had already summoned the Convention Parliament, which drew up the Declaration of Rights and brought him to the throne on equal terms with Mary.

Churchill's position amid the strife and tumult of the times was embarrassing. He had been created an English peer, with the title of Baron Churchill of Sandridge, in the county of Herts, at the accession of James II. He stood almost to the last at the side of the King, though with ever-deepening misgivings. The King had treated him with marked distinction. Churchill had followed his fortunes as Duke of York, and had been admitted to his confidence to a degree that was rare with James. It is certain that Churchill would never have treated an enemy driven to bay and craving mercy as James treated Monmouth, and his master's cruel and vin-

dictive attitude on that occasion made him wince. He disliked the attempt of the King to bring the Prince of Denmark over to Roman Catholicism, and was annoyed when overtures in the same direction were made to himself.

Churchill could not forget that his father had been loyal to Charles I., and had suffered in the Civil Wars, whilst his own sympathies and sword had been given without stint to the House of Stuart. He was a convinced Anglican in religion, opposed equally, as men put it in those days, to all Popish and Puritan innovations. In politics he was identified for the greater part of his life with the Tory party. Both circumstances need to be borne in mind in any attempt to estimate his conduct. But during the reign of James he stood outside politics, until the last critical weeks, when he induced the Princess of Denmark to surrender her rights so far as to consent that William of Orange, if he accepted the crown, should reign for life even if his wife remained childless, or even, as actually happened, died before him. Churchill knew better than any other man in England the temper of William. He realized that the Prince would never accept the throne unless his rights were fully safeguarded. William of Orange already stood revealed as the most capable and ambitious Prince in Europe. Great schemes were revolving in that powerful mind, and amongst them the determination to measure swords with Louis XIV.

Churchill has been blamed not a little for his desertion of James II., and yet it is not difficult to understand what it was that impelled him to part company with the King. He was not unmindful of the marked consideration he had always received from James, from the days when he was a page at Whitehall to the beginning of the reign, when he had been created



an English peer, crushed Monmouth's rebellion, and was rewarded with the coveted posts of Major-General and Colonel of the 3rd Horse Guards. But he had followed the King's public policy with grave misgivings, and every year convinced him that if it was pursued much longer, in the same high-handed manner, the best interests of the nation would be imperilled. The best interests of the nation to Churchill, soldier though he was, meant the loyalty of the people to the Throne and the stability of the Protestant religion. Even as early as the period when he was sent on a special mission to France, to thank Louis XIV. for the subsidy which James received shortly after his accession, Churchill, when in Paris, told Lord Galway: "If the King should attempt to change our religion and constitution, I will instantly quit his service."<sup>1</sup>

Probably the last straw with Churchill was the Declaration of Indulgence, which was issued by the King in May, 1688. Even then he did not desert James; on the contrary, he remained at his side, in command of the troops at Salisbury, until William of Orange had actually landed in England. Then he accepted the logic of accomplished events, and to have done otherwise would have been to plunge the nation in civil war. He had used every argument, long before this, to convince the King that the course he was pursuing was fatal, and it was only when he was forced to recognize that further expostulation was useless that he parted company with the monarch, who seemed bent on the ruin of the nation.

Lady Churchill throughout the crisis was in close attendance on the Princess of Denmark. As soon as tidings came that William of Orange had landed, the King hastened to Salisbury, accompanied by

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 16.

Prince George, to place himself at the head of his troops. Anne's position was supremely difficult. Her affection for her father had been alienated quite as much by his persistent attempts to win her to Roman Catholicism as by his habitual coldness. On the other hand, in spite of her ardent attachment to Protestantism, she did not altogether trust, and it is certain that she did not personally like, her brother-in-law, who had come as its avowed champion. Her pride, moreover, had been ruffled by the fact that the Prince of Orange had come with other rights than those of her sister's husband, and that she herself had been persuaded by Lord Churchill to consent to this stipulation. Lady Churchill knew less of William than her husband did. James II. had always treated her well, though she had resented the attempts made by her brother-in-law, Lord Tyrconnel, to enlist her aid to make the Princess comply with her father's wishes.

She was as much opposed as Churchill to the King's Popish proclivities, and she felt more keenly than he the forced surrender of Anne to William's claims. Moreover, she disliked even more than her mistress this cold, resolute, taciturn Prince, who had come to England by virtue of his wife's position as heir to the throne, and was not the man, as she rightly conjectured, if once established on it, to show much consideration for the feelings of others. It was at this juncture, with William of Orange on the march, and James II. at the head of a disaffected army, that tidings came to the Cockpit that Prince George of Denmark had galloped off to join the standard of the coming King. The news quickly followed that James II., driven to desperation, was returning to London. "This put the Princess," states Lady Churchill, "into a great fright. She sent for me, told me her distress," and declared that

"rather than see her father she would jump out of the window."<sup>1</sup>

Absolutely unnerved by the dramatic turn of events, the Princess, though she had in reality nothing to fear, determined on sudden flight. Perhaps she thought that, in view of her husband's desertion, she might be sent to the Tower; and Lady Churchill not improbably thought the same, as her lord also had put spurs to his horse to meet William. They both knew full well the relentless and vindictive temper of James—perhaps the most imperious of all the Stuarts—and neither of them cared to brave his displeasure. The Princess accordingly left the Cockpit at dead of night, in a hackney-coach, accompanied by Lady Churchill and Lady Fitzharding, under the care of the Bishop of London and the Earl of Dorset. They rested till morning under the Bishop's roof, and took a coach next day to the country-seat of Lord Dorset.

Here Lady Churchill may be left to tell the rest of the adventure:

"From thence we went to the Earl of Northampton's, and from thence to Nottingham, where the country gathered about the Princess; nor did she think herself safe till she saw herself surrounded by the Prince of Orange's friends."<sup>2</sup>

Whilst at Nottingham, to cheer the Princess in her suspense, a banquet was held in her honour. The hosts were the noblemen and officers assembled in the town, and Anne went, accompanied only by Lady Churchill and Lady Fitzharding. Colley Cibber, the famous actor, then a mere youth of seventeen, was serving in the Earl of Devonshire's levy, which had been raised for the help of William of

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 16.

- *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Orange. Many years afterwards, when he wrote his autobiography, quaintly entitled "An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian," he did not forget those stirring days or that night of the banquet. It seems that there was a lack of waiters, and this young recruit to the standard of William was in consequence present at that entertainment in this humble capacity:

"The post assigned me was to observe what the Lady Churchill might call for. Being so near the table, you may naturally ask me what I heard, what passed in conversation at it, which I should certainly tell you had I attended to above two words that were uttered there, and those were, 'Some wine and water.' These I remember because they came from the fair guest, whom I took so much pleasure to wait upon. Except at that single sound, all my senses were collected into my eyes, which during the whole entertainment wanted no better amusement than of stealing now and again the delight of gazing on the fair object so near me. If so clear an emanation of beauty, such a commanding grace of aspect, struck me into a regard that had something softer in it than the most profound respect, I cannot see why I may not, without offence, remember it."

Lady Churchill's beautiful face, even though it was clouded at the moment by anxiety for her lord and concern for a Princess in distress, was responsible for a conquest which she never knew. A mere straw, perhaps, on the splendid stream of her life, but not to be tossed aside on that account, since it shows how in her least conscious moments the charm of her personality told on others. She was a woman of eighty, "a great-grandmother without grey hairs," to borrow his own words, when Colley Cibber recalled that memory of his youth.<sup>1</sup>

The ostensible cause of Lord Churchill's desertion of James was the King's determination, against his

<sup>1</sup> Colley Cibber's "Apology." London, 1740.

advice, to return to his capital. There can be no question that it cost Churchill a sharp struggle to part with his old master. All the traditions and all the memories of his life were of a kind to make him hesitate. Churchill had been trained in a household the maxim of which was, "Fear God, honour the King," and now, as he explained, in the touching letter which he wrote to James on the night of the 24th of November, 1688, when he left the camp, the claims of religion and liberty seemed to offer him no alternative. He could not uphold the King against his own conscience, nor could he place his sword at James's disposal, when he knew that that meant civil war—a civil war, moreover, in which he would be compelled to fight for the establishment in England of the Roman Catholic Church, to which all his life he was opposed. He acknowledges in this letter his personal indebtedness to the King. He declares that he cannot expect any advantages comparable to those which he was losing under any other ruler, and he asks James to "place a charitable interpretation on his actions," since he was doing violence to his own inclinations, a course to which he was compelled by the "inviolable dictates of my conscience."<sup>1</sup>

It is said that it was the Bishop of Ely who finally decided Churchill to join Prince of Orange, and that he did so by warning him that at such a crisis the claims of religion were paramount. All human motives are more or less mixed, and it is idle, therefore, to submit to remorseless analysis those which actuated Churchill. Anyhow, the die was cast on the side of the Protestant faith and the liberty of the subject.

The King read that letter with a heavy heart. It is clear that "James felt that Churchill's Protes-

<sup>1</sup> See letter in Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 22.

tantism was invincible."<sup>1</sup> He knew the value of Churchill's sword. He realized that when it was carried to William's camp the tide of fortune had turned. He saw, as the tidings spread, that the troops who were still under his standard were dispirited, restless, and even ripe for revolt.

A few weeks later it was plain to everybody that all was lost. James himself could no longer blind his eyes to the fact, and so, on the 17th of December, he left London under an armed escort, and within a week quitted the shores of England for ever.

Lady Churchill, in those anxious days which followed her husband's desertion of James, had good reason to be glad that she was at Nottingham with the troops which had been raised to support William of Orange. She feared, and probably with justice, for she knew the King's vindictive temper, that she would be sent to the Tower if James, smarting with resentment, could lay hands upon her.

Two days after the King's departure from London, the Princess of Denmark, vastly relieved by the absence of her angry father, returned to her apartments at Whitehall, and Lady Churchill came with her. Within a week, William, at the head of a mixed army of Dutch and English troops, entered the capital, and on the 13th of February, 1689, the heralds proclaimed the accession of the Prince and Princess of Orange to the throne, under the style and title of William and Mary. This was brought about by the Convention Parliament, and became valid by the acceptance by the new rulers of the memorable Declaration of Rights. William, though he had succeeded by reason of Mary's claims as next in succession, was virtually supreme from the first. He proceeded to reward his adherents, and, amongst the

<sup>1</sup> "Life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough," by Viscount Wolseley. London, 1894. VI. i., chap. xlv., p. 387.

rest, Churchill, who was created Earl of Marlborough in 1689. The Princess of Denmark, who was heir-apparent to the throne, was given apartments in St. James's Palace, and Lady Marlborough accompanied her thither.

In the summer of the year which witnessed the accession of William and Mary, a son was born to the Princess of Denmark, who, in compliment to the King, was called William. He was created Duke of Gloucester, and for years afterwards opinion in England was divided as to whether the son of the Princess of Denmark at the Court of St. James, or the son of Mary of Modena at that of St. Germain's, would eventually succeed to the throne.

James II. had many devoted adherents in the realm, and even those who were not of their number had always to reckon that he might regain his throne with the help of the arms of France. William cared little for the strife of political parties in England. But he remodelled the army, and, seeing a storm was approaching, appointed Marlborough Lieutenant-General of the Forces. One motive which had swayed him in coming to England was the determination to humble the power of France, and one of the first acts of his reign was to declare war against Louis XIV.

William, from the days of his youth, had been more or less in arms against France. He knew too well that it was the ambition of Louis to seize the Spanish Netherlands, the Palatine, and the duchy of Lorraine, so as to push the already broad frontiers of France to the banks of the Rhine. He was not possessed by an overmastering desire to exchange Holland for England, or the rank of Stadtholder amongst his own people for that of monarch over subjects of an alien race, whom he little understood and whose allegiance was doubtful. He accepted the crown in order to

enlist England in the confederation which he had already brought about to resist the military aggressions of France. He saw that, if England joined forces with Spain, Holland, and Austria, such a coalition would prove, not merely formidable, but resistless. He did not count on the fact that three-fourths of the Irish people were opposed to his accession, or that Tyrconnel was posing as the champion of the Irish Catholics, and had an army of 100,000 men prepared to take the field on behalf of James.

It is impossible here to sketch the reign of William III. even in outline. The dramatic events which marked it may be broadly divided into the military struggles which culminated in the Peace of Ryswick in 1697, and the events which led to the War of the Spanish Succession—that great, protracted, crowning struggle with France which William planned, though death claimed him before actual hostilities began. William was one of the least impulsive of men, and it is clear that he would not have declared war on France in 1689 if his hand had not been forced, not only by the manner in which James had been received at the French Court, but by the men and money which Louis XIV. at once placed at his disposal for the invasion of Ireland. If William had been the most pacific of men, that was both an insult and a menace which could not be overlooked. He would have preferred to wait for the clash of arms which he knew was inevitable, until he knew more of the temper of the English people, and had gathered the reins of government more firmly into his hands. As it was, he had no alternative but to take up the gage of battle.

James II. had devoted adherents in Scotland as well as in Ireland, and William had to reckon with Graham of Claverhouse north of the Tweed, as well as with



Tyrconnel across the Irish Channel. The struggle was short and sharp in Scotland, but it was long and bitter in Ireland. The Highland revolt was crushed in June. Meanwhile James had landed in Ireland, conveyed thither by a French fleet, and with officers, arms, and a rich war-chest, provided by Louis XIV. The Irish rallied to his standard, and the rebellion was ultimately quelled after military operations which lasted for eighteen months, and culminated in William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne on the 1st of July, 1690.

In the fighting in Ireland Marlborough's sword was called into play, as well as in the campaign in Flanders, which quickly followed the declaration of war with France. Hostilities in the Low Countries, were not brought to an end until William forced the surrender of Namur in the autumn of 1695, one result of which was the Peace of Ryswick, which wrested from France all conquests made since the Treaty of Nimeguen in 1678, and compelled Louis publicly to acknowledge William as King of England, and the Princess Anne as his successor.

The closing years of the reign were marked by the Partition Treaties, the Act of Settlement, the death of James II. in 1701, which was immediately followed—in open violation of the Treaty of Ryswick—by the proclamation of his son by Louis as James III., an act which brought the nation to the verge of war, and proved an uneasy burden to Marlborough after William's sudden death.

Lady Marlborough declared that, at the time of James's jeopardy and William's advent as Defender of the Faith, she thought of nothing but playing at cards. She must have been more simple than the world is prepared to credit, if she believed, as she afterwards affirmed, that William of Orange had merely come to compel James to reason, and that

he meant to leave the country as soon as order was established. That is an incredible statement, for she knew the mind of her lord, and he in the summer of 1688 was already making overtures to William. It is more easy to believe that, looking back at events, her recollections of the tumult of those times was coloured by the mortal antipathy to the "Dutch Monster," which quickly took possession of her when William began to treat both herself and her husband cavalierly.

William recognized the military genius of Marlborough, and was quick to detect that he was not only a consummate soldier, but an adroit diplomatist. He used him as he used other men, for the service of the State, though without yielding his own authority by a hair's breadth. But it is probable that, if William had lived through the War of the Spanish Succession, he would either have had to give Marlborough a free hand, or the latter would have compassed his downfall. Marlborough was restless under William. By his desertion of James, he had broken with the only King to whom he was bound to be loyal by the traditions of his life. No man knew how long the reign of William would last, or when his authority would be shattered. He seemed to represent, to soldiers and statesmen alike, an uneasy compromise, and, almost to the last days of the reign, endless were the intrigues between the Court of St. Germain and prominent men in England, who were chilled by William's cold attitude and the practical working of the principles established at the Revolution.

Marlborough knew that William, at least, distrusted him, and the fact that he was conscious there was ground for such an attitude did not render his position more easy. He was aware, moreover, that Queen Mary, on whose judgment in all that related

to his new kingdom William relied, did not mend matters. It was Queen Mary who brought about his dismissal in 1692, and subsequent removal to the Tower, and her death, therefore, two years later, naturally occasioned no sorrow to a man whom she had thwarted.

Queen Mary's relations with Lady Churchill at the beginning of the reign were cordial. They could scarcely have been otherwise, since, writing from Holland a few months before her accession, she had expressed the hope that her sister and Lady Churchill would never part, and in a letter to the latter had declared:

"Your friendship makes my sister as dear to you as to me, and I am persuaded we shall ever agree in our care for her, as I believe she and I should in our kindness for you, were we near enough to renew our acquaintance."<sup>1</sup>

It appears that certain tattlers at the Court of Whitehall, who saw how events were shaping, sought to prejudice the Princess of Orange against Lady Churchill. This led the Princess of Denmark to write to her sister:

"Sorry people have taken great pains to give you so ill a character of Lady Churchill. I believe there is nobody in the world has better tokens of religion than she has. I am sure she is not strict as some are, nor does she keep such a bustle with religion, which I confess I think ne'er the worse, for one sees so many saints devils that if you be a good Christian the less stir one make it is better in my opinion. As for her moral principles, it is impossible to have better, and without that, all the lifting up of hands and eyes, (and) going to Church will prove but a very lame devotion."<sup>2</sup>

The Princess further assures her sister that Lady Churchill "abhors" the Church of Rome, and is never

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

likely in that respect to change. Then follows a significant passage about Churchill, to the effect that he is a very faithful servant to the King, but, in spite of this, the Princess is confident that, rather than change his religion, he will relinquish all his appointments. The letter reveals not only Anne's opinion of the Churchills when the reign of James was drawing to its disastrous close, but shows incidentally that she must have discussed with them quite freely the coming storm, which they saw was inevitable if the King pursued the course, on which he seemed bent, to the bitter end.

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## CHAPTER V

### WILLIAM III AND THE MARLBOROUGHS

THE accession of William and Mary brought many dangers, and not least to the Princess of Denmark. The Queen was childless, and by the Revolution settlement her sister, failing any direct heir, stood next in succession to the throne. William's health, even then, was uncertain; he was troubled with sharp attacks of asthma, and the English climate did not suit him. He peevishly declared that he could not live either at Whitehall or St. James's, since the air of the town choked him. Windsor was not much to his taste, and hence he lived for the most part at Hampton Court or at Kensington Palace, though not until he had indulged his passion for bricks and mortar in both places. Even in the season the King was a recluse, and the people were inclined to contrast the old gaiety and splendour of Whitehall with its present silent and for the most part deserted condition. But they took comfort, for it looked uncommonly as if Queen Mary might ere long reign alone. She was much younger than William—full of vivacity and the zest of life, and in perfect health. Probably if William had been a widower in 1688 he would never have come to the throne, for it was Mary's claims which made the new reign acceptable to the rank and file of the people. If she, though dead, had left a child, William might still have succeeded; but if he had done so under such conditions, the chances are that he would soon have outlived his welcome.

The people adored Mary. She was called the "Incomparable Princess," and she possessed, what Anne lacked, personal beauty and the magic charm of her race. So long as Mary was at his side, notwithstanding sullen Jacobites and the endless political intrigues in which they were engaged, William had little to fear—though fear, in truth, was foreign to the man. Mary had accepted, not without natural regret, but as inevitable, the disallowance of her father's rights. She had done so in part because of her ardent attachment to Protestantism, and in part because of her deep and unalterable loyalty to William, and her belief that he alone could restore order to a distracted realm. She had been perfectly happy in Holland, and had not cherished any ambition to change her lot; but when it came without any seeking on her part, she rose at once with dignity to the uneasy burden of the crown.

William was a soldier, a statesman, and above all else a man of vision. He had not brought about the Grand Alliance for nothing; he saw that, with the authority of England at his back, he could fulfil his ambition, which was to arrest the menacing power of France to Europe. Queen Mary, to borrow Lady Marlborough's words, "mightily caressed" the lady who stood so high in the regard of her sister, the Princess of Denmark, and was, moreover, the wife of the most brilliant soldier in England. The King, and Marlborough in his service, were much abroad fighting, now in Ireland and now in Flanders. It is related that William on one of these occasions turned to the Prince of Vaudemont, one of his most trusted commanders in Holland, and asked his opinion of the English generals whom the fortunes of war had brought across the sea. The reply was: "Kirke has fire, Laneir thought, Mackay skill, Colchester bravery, but there is something inexpressible in the Earl of

Marlborough. All their virtues seem to be united in his single person. If I can read what is written in his face, no subject of your Majesty can ever attain such a height of military glory as that to which this combination of perfections must raise him." William was startled, but replied with a smile: "I believe the Earl of Marlborough will do his part to verify your prediction."<sup>1</sup>

Long before the reign began—as far back, indeed, as the year in which Charles II. died—the relations between the Princess Anne and Lady Marlborough were of a kind which never before or since existed at Court. The Princess, then recently wedded, and but twenty years of age, deliberately set aside all considerations of rank, and insisted that her Lady-in-Waiting should waive all ceremony in her presence, since she regarded her as her most confidential friend. Lady Marlborough's account of what happened and the reasons which led to it may be cited:

"She grew weary to be treated by me with the form and ceremony due to her rank; nor could she bear from me the sound of words which implied in them distance and superiority. It was this turn of mind which made her one day propose to me that, whenever I should happen to be absent from her, we might in all our letters write ourselves by feigned names, such as would impart nothing of distinction of rank between us. Morley and Freeman were the names her fancy hit upon, and she left me to choose by which of them I should be called. My frank, open temper led me to fix upon Freeman, and so the Princess took the other, and from this time 'Mrs. Morley' and 'Mrs. Freeman' began to converse as equals, made so by affection and friendship."<sup>2</sup>

In order to complete this sentimental compact, and at the same time to make up a quartette, Prince

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Letters, and see Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 16.

George, with becoming grace, good-humouredly accepted the rôle of Mr. Morley, whilst Lord Marlborough became known in the esoteric circle as Mr. Freeman.

It is believed that Anne borrowed these names from a book which she read in her girlhood, and which extolled the virtues of friendship. It is piquant to think that plain Mr. and Mrs. Morley was the disguise chosen for Prince George and no less illustrious a lady than the Queen's sister. Mr. Freeman was scarcely an appropriate name to bestow on a man who in matters domestic was then and always deferential to his wife. But Mrs. Freeman suited Lady Marlborough to a nicety, since she was as independent a woman as ever lived. Anne disliked, as she put it, to be called "your Highness" at every word—at least by the Lady of the Bedchamber to whom she had taken so violent a fancy.

"Be as free with me as one friend ought to be with another," were her words. "You can never give me any greater proof of your friendship than in telling me your mind freely in all things, which I do beg you to do."<sup>1</sup>

Anne, both as Princess and Queen, was a stickler for etiquette. She expected to be approached by other people, however exalted, with all due ceremony, and she did not conceal her displeasure if the most powerful men in the land inadvertently forgot her rank for a moment. But all this was set aside with Lady Marlborough, and even if they had been sisters there could not have been less constraint in their intercourse. It is amusing to think how implicitly the Princess was taken at her word when she stipulated that Lady Marlborough should always speak her mind freely. It was her foible to do that, and to

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Letters; and see Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 16.



do it at times in the most sudden and disconcerting way, and Anne must often have winced when Sarah in the letter and spirit played the part of candid friend without misgiving. As time went on, Sarah told her her mind with a vengeance; but for a long term of years they were devoted to each other. As must always happen in such circumstances, the strong nature ruled the weak, and, since love is blind, did so half unconsciously, and, assuredly, without challenge. This could not have come about unless there had been much in common between them in more important directions than the love of scandal over a dish of tea, or a game of cards when the wax candles were lighted and the curtains drawn. Neither of them cared a jot for the vanished splendour of the Court of Charles. They were not prudes, but Lady Castlemaine, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and other fair women of doubtful reputation, were not to their mind. On the other hand, they disliked the folly of extremes quite as much, and did not relish in the reign of James—whom they both knew to be little better than the late King in morals—seeing Whitehall shorn of its glories, and filled with melancholy priests. They were of one mind as to the folly of the King, though they dared not express it except in whispered confidences, when James rode roughshod over the liberties of his subjects and made the Revolution inevitable.

They both disliked the Prince of Orange, and all the more because he never took trouble to pay compliments; and as his reign proceeded their dislike deepened into animosity, for William was not merely taciturn, but maladroit.

Anne took religion seriously, and Sarah took it as a matter of course. Both shrank in horror from Roman Catholicism. Sarah was not a whit less Protestant than Anne; where they differed—it made no difference in their friendship—was in their in-

terpretation of it. Anne was a devout Protestant according to her lights, whereas political rather than religious motives determined Sarah's adhesion to the creed in which she had been brought up. Anne was a lover of the quiet life. Nothing pleased her better than to pursue the even tenor of her way. She was not in any sense adventurous. Her instincts, her temperament, her training, confirmed her allegiance to the Church of England. At the same time she was not righteous overmuch, and she certainly did not fast like Mary of Modena. She was the sort of woman who could have been matched in every county in her kingdom—sensible, home-loving, unimaginative, possessed of religion rather than possessed by it.

Sarah magnified the right of private judgment without always making it honourable. She did not care a snap of the fingers for the clergy, though she had some devoted friends amongst them. She was devoid of ghostly apprehensions, shaped her creed for herself—it was quite as much pagan as Christian—and in the main lived up to it, defying other people to set her right on points of conscience, or in any other way. Mrs. Freeman was as fond of the sunshine as Mrs. Morley of the shade, and, though secretly in revolt against the tame, humdrum routine of Anne's household, she had the good sense to humour the Princess to the top of her bent, though with mocking merriment.

They were both happily married. Anne regarded her dull, good-tempered, submissive consort as a paragon amongst Princes. Sarah was proud that she had the undivided homage of the most adroit courtier and the greatest soldier in the land—a man of genius to whom all things were possible, if not under William, then at no distant day. The Princess and Lady Marlborough were in agreement in regard to the

monarch whom they derided one day as Caliban, and the next as the "Dutch Monster." "Manners maketh man," as the old motto runs, and the King lacked them, and small-talk as well. The two ladies did not like his looks. He seemed to them hipped and moody. They did not appreciate his phlegmatic Dutch soldiers and courtiers; they thought he might have unbent occasionally—in spite of his asthma—and gone to the play, but he was never seen at the theatre during his reign, though he was not exactly a saint.

Another bond of sympathy was that young children were springing up around them, though in Anne's case, with one exception, they faded away almost as soon as they were born. Marlborough, even before he was advanced to an earldom, had built himself a country-seat, and at St. Albans, because his wife's childhood had been spent there. It was called Holywell House, and was a spacious and picturesque mansion with a fine garden, with trout for the table in the stream which ran through it. He loved the place. His letters from abroad, written amidst shot and shell, show it, and there most of his children were born. He thought, in the midst of his great campaigns, of the pears and peaches which were ripening on the sunny brick walls of his gardens, and he wished himself in its peaceful seclusion, with the woman he loved at his side.

Eight children were born to John Churchill and Sarah, his wife. Three of them died in infancy. Their only surviving son, who bore his father's name, and afterwards became Marquis of Blandford, had two sisters older than himself and two younger, all of whom married into the peerage. The eldest was Henrietta, born in 1681, who married Lord Rialton, son of the Earl of Godolphin, and succeeded, on her father's death, as Duchess of Marlborough. The

second, Anne, born in 1685, married Lord Spencer, afterwards third Earl of Sunderland. Her second son, Charles, fifth Earl of Sunderland, became Duke of Marlborough on the death of his aunt Henrietta in 1733, and in that branch of the family the title has descended. Anne received her name in honour of the Princess of Denmark, who was her godmother. The third daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1687, married Scroop Egerton, Earl, and afterwards Duke, of Bridgewater; whilst Mary, the youngest, named after her godmother the Queen, married Lord Monthermer, who soon afterwards became Duke of Montague.

Two of the daughters of Marlborough, therefore, became Duchesses, and the other two died Countesses, for a dukedom was not conferred on Lord Egerton until after the death of his wife. Anne, Countess of Sunderland, through whom the existing dukedom is derived, and Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, died in their father's lifetime; the first in 1716, and the second in 1714. Neither Lady Anne nor Lady Elizabeth, though their portraits adorn its walls, ever lived at Blenheim; whilst as for Lord Blandford, his life had run its short course before the great battle was fought of which that historic house is so stately a memorial. The Duchess of Montague was the only child of that large family who survived her mother.

All of them were endowed with good looks. Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, and Mary, Duchess of Montague, were extremely beautiful women. Anne, Countess of Sunderland, was also singularly attractive, and had what her mother lacked, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. She was the peacemaker of the family. Marlborough was always a kind and indulgent father, and no blow that fell upon him, after the loss of his son and heir, the Marquis of Blandford—a youth of exceptional promise—wounded

him more than the death, at six-and-twenty, of Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, whom he idolized, and who bore the name of his mother. He was abroad at the time, and the stars in their courses seemed fighting against him, for he had crosses enough in 1714. Henrietta, Countess of Godolphin, and afterwards Duchess of Marlborough in her own right, possessed her mother's temper without her good looks or her shining gifts.

But in the reign of William and Mary they were all pretty children, full of high spirits. They passed their childhood, not amid the ceremonials of the Court, but in happy freedom at Holywell House, St. Albans, or at a cottage nearer town on Barnes Common, within more easy reach of their affectionate, but always imperious, mother. The Princess of Denmark took a lively interest in Lady Marlborough's children, especially in her own demure little namesake and the handsome, high-spirited boy, who ran the chance of being spoilt by his four sisters, a peril which he escaped when in due course he was sent to Eton.

Prince George of Denmark, from his first coming to England, to his death at Kensington in 1708, was always on easy and confidential terms with the Marlboroughs. He was well disposed to William at the beginning of the reign; but the King, who had no patience with weak men, even if they were good-natured, treated him with scarcely veiled contempt, and quite needlessly gave him ground for personal resentment, an attitude which constant intercourse with Lady Marlborough was not likely to lessen. She on her part had more enemies than she knew, for haughty manners, when linked to sarcastic speech and self-assertion, provoke resentment, which, though hidden, is none the less dangerous on that account. She had to reckon even at this time with one open foe in the person of the Earl of Rochester.

The brother-in-law of James II., Rochester had filled the high place of Lord Treasurer, a post from which he was dismissed because of his refusal to change his religion at the King's bidding. At the Revolution he came into favour again, and adopted an almost paternal attitude towards Mary and Anne. He had little difficulty with his niece, the Queen, but the Princess of Denmark by no means relished his somewhat dictatorial attitude. Lady Marlborough was cordially disliked by Rochester. He had opposed her first appointment in Anne's household, and did his best, on more than one occasion, to bring about her dismissal. He felt that, if her strong personality were out of the way, Anne as well as Mary would be as wax in his hands. But he played his cards too openly, and, instead of detaching his niece from her favourite, succeeded in drawing them more closely together, winning in the process the hostility of both.

Rochester was both ambitious and far-seeing. He ingratiated himself with William, and at the same time was not blind to the chance of Anne's succession. His hostility to Lady Marlborough—he had good reason to recognize it before he died—went far to wreck his career, for when she shaped the whispers of a throne they were not too kindly so far as she was concerned. Even in the reign of James, Rochester had offended Anne by telling the King that she was too extravagant, and he made matters worse at the beginning of William's reign by his churlish attitude over the settlement of £50,000 a year, which was then made upon her, as well as by a subsequent attempt to remove Lady Marlborough from her entourage. "My only fault," states the latter, "was being my Lord Marlborough's wife; a fault which I could neither excuse, extenuate, or repent of." In Rochester's eyes that was not her only

fault, for she stood between him and the authority, as uncle, which he claimed over Anne.

Far more important in its issues than Rochester's hostility was the coldness which, partly because of it, sprang up between Mary and Anne. Family quarrels are not pleasant to recount, and there is no need here to dwell in detail on the unhappy differences which divided the two sisters. It is easy to lay the blame on Lady Marlborough, as some have done. She never excelled as a peace-maker, but, in truth, the reason of the discord, though she took violent sides when it arose, was due to a conflict of temperaments. Mary, beyond all else, was the loyal wife of William, and she rather outdid the part, though he was none too loyal to her. She was a childless woman, and it seemed just then as if the succession would eventually pass to Anne's son, the youthful Duke of Gloucester. Mary was impressionable, vivacious, easy of speech, fond of admiration. Anne was silent, lethargic, moody—a woman of few words but quiet determination, who had grown sensitive to any affront since she had detected the King's cavalier treatment of her husband. Her position was curiously isolated. William and Mary went their own way, and the Court went with them, whilst Anne and her Danish consort lived chiefly in dull retirement.

William was parsimonious in money affairs; at all events, his generosity did not extend beyond his Dutch soldiers and courtiers. He did not relish the movement which was made in Parliament to increase his sister-in-law's allowance after the birth of the Duke of Gloucester. He believed in the power of the purse, and wished to keep the Princess and her husband in leading-strings, and not to make them independent of the favour of the Crown. Anne was his wife's sister, and that was all. She on her part

resented the Queen's attitude over the question of the Settlement. Mary had asked her why the project had been raised, and Anne had replied that her friends thought it was desirable that her position should be assured. To this the Queen replied, with an imperious air: "Pray, what friends have you but the King and myself?" Anne was undemonstrative and remained silent, but she never forgot the affront. Other mortifications quickly followed. The King made it plain that he did not wish for the services of Prince George either by land or by sea. The Prince thought it his duty to accompany William to Ireland, when he went to crush the Rebellion; but, though he remained through the whole campaign, the King took no more notice of him than if he had been a "page of the backstairs." He was not deficient either in courage or devotion to his adopted country, and of this he gave another proof when William set out for Flanders. He asked the King's permission to serve him as a volunteer at sea and without any command. The King said nothing to this, but bade him farewell. Prince George thought silence meant consent, and made preparations which were noised abroad. Whereupon the Queen sent positive instructions forbidding him to carry out his purpose. It was humiliating to stand so near the throne at so critical a time, to be eager for its defence, and yet to be ignored as a negligible quantity.

Lady Marlborough always maintained that the position at this time became so embarrassing that she proposed more than once to retire from Anne's household. The Princess would not listen for a moment to such a proposal, and declared she would rather live in a cottage than "reign Empress of the world" without her dear Mrs. Freeman.

Meanwhile the Court did not conceal its displeasure. If Lady Marlborough had been as much of a self-



seeker as is commonly represented, she would have wavered in her allegiance to the Princess; for Queen Mary opened negotiations with her on more than one occasion in order to bring her sister to reason, and it was only after the failure of such overtures that her attitude hardened. Marlborough's position at this time was other than easy. William resented his plain speech about the marked favour shown in England to the Dutch soldiers and courtiers who had followed the fortunes of their master at the Revolution. He was serving in Flanders when the Battle of the Boyne was fought. He had felt a reluctance which did him credit to take the field against his old Sovereign, to whom in truth he was warmly attached. It was not, therefore, until James, crushed and discredited, had quitted the shores of Ireland that Marlborough went thither to complete the subjugation of the country by the capture of Cork and Kinsale. The fact that he was Tyrconnel's brother-in-law raised suspicions, and the conduct of his own brother, then Captain, and afterwards Admiral, Churchill, in receiving unlawful convoy money—an accusation which was fully proved—did not lessen his embarrassments.

William as early as 1690 had already lost to some extent the good-will of the nation. His dry manners, his foreign bodyguard, his apparently studied indifference to public opinion, and even the fact that he never was seen at the theatre, told against him. He could scarcely speak the English language, and was careless, to the point of ostentation, of the susceptibilities of his subjects. Charles II. was a gallant, punctiliously courteous to all ladies, though conspicuously in the toils of the beauties of his Court. James II. had dignified manners, though he was seldom agreeable. William III., though he could turn a compliment on occasion, was usually so taciturn, so distant, and so

absolutely a preoccupied man of affairs, that the ladies of his Court had to dissemble and cloke their disdain. The outcome of it all was that William, having quelled the Irish, came back to London to find his English subjects curiously restless. Jacobite plots again became rife, for there were a good many people in the land who looked wistfully to St. Germans, and regarded the Revolution as a doubtful blessing.

The coolness between Mary and Anne became more pronounced when the Queen began to pay marked attention to the little Duke of Gloucester, sending him toys and trinkets, and at the same time making it plain that, while she was delighted to have the child at the palace, she was otherwise minded in regard to Anne. One day in the winter of 1691 the Princess received an anonymous letter. The writer hinted that she was watched, and that she was at the Cockpit in the position of "an honourable prisoner, and in the hands of the Dutch guards." He added: "If you do not part with Lord Marlborough's lady of yourself, you will be obliged to it." This curious missive ended with a prediction which the Princess dismissed as idle at the time, but which quickly proved true: "Lord Marlborough will be confined as soon as the Parliament is up."<sup>1</sup> In January, 1692, the blow fell. Marlborough, who had been with the King that morning without perceiving anything unusual in his manner, received a sudden visit from Lord Nottingham, who said that he had His Majesty's commands to demand all his commissions, since the King had no more use for his services. Bishop Burnet's comment may be cited:

"It seemed some letter was intercepted that gave suspicion; it is certain that Marlborough thought he

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

was too little considered, and that he had upon many occasions censured the King's conduct and reflected on the Dutch."<sup>1</sup>

The truth was that, whilst William had been in Flanders arranging for a concerted plan of campaign against France, a number of the most distinguished men in England had put their heads together and opened negotiations with St. Germain. Godolphin and Halifax, Sunderland, Caermarthen, and Shrewsbury, were implicated, as well as Marlborough, and even the Princess Anne wrote a letter in which she expressed contrition, and assured James of her "duty and submission." Extenuation of such treachery is impossible, and that Lady Marlborough was cognizant of it is clear from Marlborough's assurance to James that she would bring back the Princess to her allegiance. William had managed badly to bring matters to such a pass. If he had treated those about him, from the Princess downwards, with ordinary consideration, the movement in favour of James would never have come to a head. As it was, suspicion fell chiefly on Marlborough, and on the 5th of May he was sent to the Tower on a more serious charge than that which had led to his dismissal. A certain disreputable clergyman named Robert Young, imprisoned for fraud at that time in Newgate, concocted a document containing a scheme for the restoration of James, and had the audacity to append forged signatures of Marlborough, Cornbury, Salisbury, Archbishop Sancroft, and Dr. Sprat, Bishop of Rochester, to it. So cleverly was this done that the paper was accepted as authentic, and it was not until the miscreant was actually confronted by one of his victims that the forgery was detected. Meanwhile they had all been sent to prison, and

<sup>1</sup> See detailed account in "History of His Own Times," book v. (published 1723-1734).

when the charge was proved to be false they were all liberated except Marlborough, who was kept a prisoner for two months, and then admitted to bail, the reason being the suspicion created by the intercepted letter.

Lady Marlborough elected to share her husband's captivity. She knew that the charge against him was absolutely false, and that, though he had opened communications with St. Germain's, he was not guilty, any more than the others who had been set free, of conspiring, as Young had stated, for the restoration of James II. She wrote to the Princess when the crisis arose, vindicating her husband, and Anne's consternation comes to light in her reply :

" I must give dear Mrs. Freeman ten thousand thanks for her two kind letters and assure her 'tis not necessary to make excuses for the length. Could you but imagine how very welcome they are to me, I am sure you would not do it. I hear Lord Marlboro' is sent to Ye Tower, and tho' I am certain they have nothing against him and expected by your letter it would be so, yet I was struck when I was told it, for methinks it is a dismal thing to have one's friends sent to that place. I have a thousand mellencholly thoughts and can't help fearing they should hinder you from coming to me, though how they could do that without making you a prisoner to, I cannot imagine. I am just now told by pretty good hands that as soon as the wind turns westerly there will be guards set upon the Prince and me. If you hear there is any such thing designed and 'tis easy to you, prey let me see you before the wind changes, for afterwards one does not know whether they will let one have any opportunitys of speaking to one another. But let them do what they please nothing shall ever vex me so I can have the satisfaction of seeing dear Mrs. Freeman. I sweare I could live on bread and water between four walls with her without repineing, for as long as you continue kind nothing can ever be a reall mortification to your faithful Mrs. Morley, who wishes she may never have a moment's happiness

in this world or the next, if ever she proves false to you.”<sup>1</sup>

All epistles, written in terms of extravagant attachment, used to be called by Lady Marlborough “letters of protestation,” no matter who wrote them. Mrs. Morley, though staid and undemonstrative enough to most people, wrote with a headlong, impetuous pen whenever she addressed Mrs. Freeman. She set no bounds to her ardent expressions of devotion; in fact, she protested too much, and from her own lips, in the light of her subsequent conduct, comes her condemnation

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers, and see Coxe, “Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. 1, p. 38.

## CHAPTER VI

MRS. MORLEY AND MRS. FREEMAN

WHILST Marlborough was still a prisoner in the Tower, his youngest son, a little child named Charles, died. Lady Marlborough, stunned by this new blow, and reluctant to draw the Princess more under the displeasure of the Court, again proposed to retire from Anne's service; and evidently, from the letter which follows, she hinted that such a separation would be an advantage to Mrs. Morley. But Anne was determined, at all hazards to herself, not to countenance such a proposal:

" You must give me leave, once more, to beg you will never mention so cruel a thing again, for it pierces to my very heart and soul, and, for God's sake, be assured, besides the acting a base ungrateful part towards you (which is a thing I abhor), I am fully persuaded I shou'd be the meanest, pittifulest wretch on earth if I did not retire from such ministers."<sup>1</sup>

The Princess appears to have plucked up courage to write to Queen Mary on the subject of Marlborough's imprisonment, and she states that she entrusted her letter to the Bishop of Worcester, who promised to present it, and to do what lay in his power to further its request.

Sarah was not in attendance at the moment, so Anne writes:

" I told the Bishop you had desir'd you might go from me, and that I had as often conjur'd you not

<sup>1</sup> *Blenheim Papers.*

to do it, and I have repeated the same thing over and over again to-day, for you can easily imagine, I will never neglect anything that can be of service to you. I beg you again, for Christ Jesus sake, that you wou'd never think of parting with your faithful Mrs Morley, for be assur'd, if you shou'd ever do so cruel a thing as to leave me, from that moment I shall never enjoy one quiet hour, and shou'd you do it without asking me consent (which if I ever give you, may I never see the face of Heaven) I will shut mysele up, and never see any of the world more, but live where I may be forgotten by human kind."<sup>1</sup>

This impassioned missive ends with the assurance that Mrs. Morley has "read and kiss'd" Mrs. Freeman's last "dear kind letter over and over." It also tells her—which perhaps was not unnecessary, since Mrs. Freeman always called a spade a spade, and did not mince her opinions about anybody, and therefore must sometimes have cherished misgivings after her written words were beyond recall—that "she need never be in pain" about her confidences. "I take such care of them, 'tis not possible any accident can happen that they shou'd be seen by anybody."<sup>2</sup>

Queen Mary had already made it plain that she was bent on forcing the Princess and Lady Marlborough apart; but she wished the act to appear as if it had been brought about with her sister's concurrence. Here the letter which the Princess sent to the Queen by the Bishop of Worcester may be cited. The opening sentence will be clear when it is stated that the Princess had just recovered from child-bed after an illness which at one time seemed critical.

"SION,  
"May 20<sup>th</sup> (1692).

"I have now, God be thank'd, recover'd my strength well enough to go abroad. And, though my duty and inclination would both lead me to wait upon

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

your Majesty, as soon as I am able to do it, yet of late I have had the misfortune of being so much under your Majesty's displeasure, as to apprehend there may be hard constructions made upon anything I may either do or not do, with the most respectful intentions, and I am in doubt whether the same arguments, that have prevailed with your Majesty to forbid people from showing their usual respects to me, may not be carried so much farther as not to permit me to pay my duty to you. That, I acknowledge, would be a great increase of affliction to me; and nothing but your Majesty's own command shall ever willingly make me submit to it, for, whatever reason I may think in my own mind, I have to complain of being hardly used, yet I will strive to hide it as much as possible. And, though I will not pretend to live at the Cockpit, unless you would be so kind as to make it easy to me, yet wherever I am I will endeavour always to give the constant marks of duty and respect which I have in my heart for your Majesty, as becomes your Majesty's very affectunate sister and servant,

" ANNE."<sup>1</sup>

The Queen's reply was haughty as well as cold:

" WHITEHALL,

" *May ye 20th* (1692).

" I have received yours by the Bishop of Worcester, and have very little to say to it, since you cannot but know, that, as I never love compliments, so now they will not serve. 'Tis none of my fault, we live at this distance, and I have endeavoured to show my willingness to do otherwise, and I will do no more. Don't give yourself any unnecessary trouble, for, be assured, 'tis not words can make us live together as we ought. You know what was required of you, and I now tell you, if you doubted it before, that I cannot change my mind, but expect to be complied with, or you must not wonder if I doubt your kindness. You can give no other marks of it that can satisfy me.

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," pp. 76, 77.



Nor can I put any other construction upon your actions than what all the world must do that sees them. These things don't hinder me being very glad to hear you are so well, and wishing you may continue so, and that you may yet, while it is in your power, oblige me to be your affectionate sister,

"MARIE R."<sup>1</sup>

Anne could be led, but neither then nor at any other period of her life could she be coerced. She keenly resented this harsh and peremptory reply, which she justly describes as an "arbitrary letter." She received it at the moment when London was filled with rejoicings over the defeat of the French fleet off La Hogue. Such tidings placed her in a dilemma. Under ordinary circumstances, Prince George and herself would have hastened to the Court to congratulate William and Mary on the victory, as in duty bound. Even as matters stood, it would have been politic to do so ; but, smarting under such a rebuff, as Anne explained to Lady Marlborough, "neither of us thought there was any necessity."

They had ample reason for resentment. The guards were beginning to grow careless in making them the usual salute, and the ladies of the Court were giving the Princess the cold shoulder. Anne felt, as she put it, that her sister was picking a quarrel, and small wonder if she resented such treatment. Her own words at that juncture reveal how much she winced :

"Sure never any body was used so by a sister ! I thank God I have nothing to reproach myself withal in this business, but, the more I think of all that has passed, the better I am satisfied. If I had done otherwise I should have deserved to be the scorn of

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," pp. 78, 79.

the world, and to be trampled upon as much as my enemies would have me."<sup>1</sup>

She felt that she was not being treated with ordinary consideration, and so exclaimed with heat: "My dear Mrs. Freeman, never believe that your faithful Mrs. Morley will ever submit. She can wait with patience for a sunshine day, and if she does not live to see it, yet she hopes England will flourish again." She was indignant at Lord Marlborough's imprisonment, and declared that she often kissed the Act of Habeas Corpus. She knew, as she put it, that Lord Marlborough had friends, and that they would not sit still whilst he languished in captivity.

Meanwhile her own position and that of Prince George were embarrassing, as this passage from a letter to Lady Marlborough reveals:

"I can't end this without telling you that the guards in St. James' Park did not stand to their arms, either when the Prince went or came. I can't believe it was their Dutch breeding alone, but Dutch orders that made them do it, because they never omitted it before, and they could not pretend to be surprised, at least not when the Prince came away, for he says the coaches were at the Cockpit near an hour."<sup>2</sup>

The Queen's letter had driven the Princess to bay. She felt that, unless she was to part with self-respect, she must make a stand against such slights. She even went so far as to declare that neither William nor Mary would have placed "any other of their subjects" in such a position. She added that, if she had felt any inclination to part with Mrs. Freeman, she was now determined to "keep her, in spite of their teeth," and, if necessary, was prepared to go

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Blenheim Papers.

to the "utmost verge of the earth, rather than live with such monsters."<sup>1</sup> She determined no longer to dance attendance on the Court, and so she writes from Sion House:

"Being now at liberty to go where I please, by the Queen's refusing to see me, I am mightily inclined to go tomorrow after dinner to ye Cockpit, and from thence privately in a chair to see you. Sometime next week, I believe, it will be time for me to go to London to make an end of that visit to Berkeley House."<sup>2</sup>

This last allusion needs explanation. The Cockpit was no longer possible, because of the displeasure of the Court. Sion House was at best only a temporary retreat, and hence, in the summer of 1692, the Prince and Princess of Denmark took up their residence at Berkeley House, which stood on the site of Devonshire House in Piccadilly, and this remained their abode until the last years of William's reign, when Kensington Palace was granted to them.

Queen Mary was obdurate, the Princess of Denmark was indignant; and as for Lady Marlborough, she had one day what she called the spleen, and the next the vapours. Her husband was in the Tower, her son was dead, she was in disgrace. Life had grown suddenly bitter. Presently her indomitable spirit reasserted itself. She would show Queen Mary that she could still carry her head high. So when Mrs. Morley felt it incumbent, for the sake of appearances, to go to Court, and wished Mrs. Freeman to bear her company through the ordeal, the latter, nothing loth, went in attendance. Instantly, matters came to a crisis. The Queen realized that Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman had set her at defiance. There could be no longer any question of half-measures. A stormy interview followed, and the

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Princess was told in peremptory terms that she must at once dismiss Lady Marlborough. But Mary had met her match. She could drive her sister from the Cockpit, but she was powerless to drive Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman apart; nor was the King's unconcealed displeasure of more avail. The Queen and the Princess parted in anger, never to meet again.

Though Berkeley House and Kensington Palace were only a mile or two apart, Prince George of Denmark might have been living in his native country, for all the attention he received from the King. His only fault was that he was William's brother-in-law, and that Queen Mary had quarrelled with the Princess Anne. James II. nicknamed his son-in-law "Est-il possible?" when he put spurs to his horse at Salisbury, after all his protestations of loyalty. The sobriquet clung to him, for the Prince's habitual mood, whatever happened, seemed to be one of surprise. Prince George was a genial, harmless man, distinguished only by his devotion to his wife and his fondness for good living. If William had treated him with the consideration due to his rank, instead of thwarting his modest ambitions at every turn, there is reason to think that he would have rendered, to the point of his capacity—which, after all, was not so slight as is usually supposed—excellent service to the Crown. He figures on the page of history as little more than a shadow, though it cannot be ignored that in the earlier years of Anne's reign he played the difficult part of Prince Consort with admirable discretion. During the Irish Rebellion, in which he narrowly missed losing his life, his services were never mentioned in the *Gazette*, and his desire for service in the war in Flanders was refused.

After the quarrel between Mary and Anne, Prince George's position was rendered the more difficult by the attention paid by the Court to the Duke of Gloucester.

Both the King and Queen were attached to the child, who was a boy of singular promise, and heir-presumptive to the throne. They sent continually from Kensington for the child, and the presents which William and Mary lavished on the boy were duly chronicled in print. The lad had a fine martial spirit, and, to the King's amusement, used to review a small band of miniature soldiers in the gardens of Kensington. He was quick-witted, and, though he knew nothing of the strained relations of the Prince and Princess with the Court, he once turned to Queen Mary with the awkward question: "My mamma once had guards as well as you: why has she not them now?" Before the embarrassed Queen could answer, a noisy drum began to beat, and the King turned to the surprised soldier and gave him two guineas. He made his youthful namesake shortly afterwards a Knight of the Garter. The Princess Anne naturally, under the circumstances, scarcely appreciated such compliments, though she was too sensible not to conceal her resentment.

Left to herself, Anne went her own way, leading a quiet life at Berkeley House, marked by little ceremony, and accepting, without more ado, her new position as a person not acceptable at Court. But she had to endure many petty affronts, which she took with more composure than Lady Marlborough, who grew angry not a little at the slights shown to her mistress. The sentry was not allowed to stand at Anne's gate; the clergy at St. James's Church, Piccadilly, where she attended, were informed that they need no longer follow the usual custom of placing the text of their sermons on her cushion. When the Princess went into the country, no escort was granted. When her carriage passed through provincial towns, all local addresses were forbidden, and the usual honours paid on the occasion of the presence of royalty were by command of the Court denied, a

proceeding all the more extraordinary since the Princess stood next in succession to the throne.

After Marlborough's grudging release from the Tower, where he had been imprisoned on an accusation which was proved to be false, the Princess was the first to drive to his house at St. Albans to congratulate him. In the following summer Lady Marlborough accompanied her to Bath, where Anne, who was already suffering from gout, went to take the waters. She was popular everywhere but at Court, and all the more so because she was a fervid Protestant. The tidings of her disgrace had apparently not travelled to that city, and she was received with public rejoicings; but Mary, who was supreme in the absence of the King abroad, at once caused one of the Ministers about her to write to the Mayor to abstain from all ceremony. The letter is curious, and, since it is short, it may be cited:

"SIR,

"The Queen has been informed that yourself and your brethren have attended the Princess with the same respect and ceremony as have been usually pay'd to the Royal family. Perhaps you may not have heard what occasion Her Majesty has had to be displeased with the Princess, and therefore I am commanded to acquaint you that you are not for the future to pay Her Highness any such respect or ceremony without leave from Her Majesty, who does not doubt of receiving from you and your brethren this public mark of your duty. I am your most humble servant,

"NOTTINGHAM."<sup>1</sup>

Lady Marlborough was probably right in thinking that the Queen's uncle, Lord Rochester, prompted this missive. He was as much opposed to her as

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough, pp. 97, 98.

William's Dutch favourite, the Earl of Portland, was to Marlborough. Lady Marlborough always believed that the latter was responsible for her husband's dismissal from office, and all the more since the King did nothing without his intimate advice. The Princess regarded this affront with merri-ment; but Lady Marlborough was inclined to look upon it as a fresh reason why she should retire—a proposal which Anne would not entertain. If Mary thought that such treatment would bring her sister to heel, she was mightily mistaken, as the following letter shows:

"Dear Mrs. Freeman must give me leave to ask her if anything has happened to make her uneasy. I thought she looked to-night as if she had the spleen, and I can't help being in pain whenever I see her so. I fancied yesterday, when the Mayor failed in the ceremony of going to church with me, that he was commanded not to do it. I think 'tis a thing to be laughed at. And if they imagine to vex me or gain upon me by such sort of usage, they will be mightily disappointed. And I hope these foolish things they do will every day show people more and more what they are, and that they truly deserve the name your faithful Morley has given them."<sup>1</sup>

Anne waxed vehement in denunciation of those at Court, whom she bitterly described as "insolent Dutch" and "mercenary Englishmen." She declared that there was no misery she would not readily suffer rather than part with Mrs. Freeman, and added, "I do swear I would sooner be torn in pieces than alter my resolution."<sup>2</sup> Her loyalty to the Marlboroughs found other expression than words.

Lord Marlborough, dismissed from all his offices, was scarcely in a position to support his rank; but he took his reverse of fortune calmly, and spent his

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Blenheim Papers.

time cultivating his garden at St. Albans, solaced by the company of his happy children, to whom he was always passionately attached. His wife was more than ever anxious to rejoin him in that pleasant retreat. She felt, moreover, that if she remained in attendance, after matters had been carried so far, Anne's allowance, in the existing temper of the Court might be reduced. The letter which follows makes it clear that the Princess herself was not without such misgivings. It was written when Lady Marlborough was at St. Albans:

"I really long to know how my dear Mrs. Freeman got home, and, now I have this opportunity of writing, she must give me leave to tell her that, if ever she should be so cruel as to leave her faithful Mrs. Morley, she will rob her of all the joy and quiet of her life; for if that day should come, I could never enjoy a happy minute, and I swear to you I would shut myself up and never see a creature! You may easily see all this would have come upon me, if you had not been. If you do but remember what the Queen said to me the night before your lord was turned out of all; then she began to pick quarrels, and if they should take off twenty or thirty thousand pounds, have I not lived on as little before? When I was first married we had but twenty—it is true the King (James II.) was so kind as to pay my debts—and if it should come to that again, what retrenchment is there in my family I would not willingly make, and be glad of that pretence to do it.

"Never fancy, my dear Mrs. Freeman, if what you fear should happen, that you are the occasion; no, I am very well satisfied, and so is the Prince too. It would have been so, however, for Caliban is capable of doing nothing but injustice. Therefore, rest satisfied, you are no ways the cause, and let me beg once more, for God's sake, that you will never mention parting more—no, nor so much as think of it. If you should ever leave me, be assured, it would break your faithful Mrs. Morley's heart."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," pp. 82, 83.



So matters went on, until the dark days before Christmas in 1694, when Queen Mary, still cherishing her resentment against her sister, fell ill.

The Queen's illness was not at first regarded seriously. She had suffered a shock by the sudden death of Archbishop Tillotson, who was struck down by paralysis whilst conducting a religious service at Whitehall. The Queen was greatly attached to this prelate, who was a great preacher and a wise counsellor, and his tragic death greatly distressed her. Pestilence just then was raging in London. Smallpox, even at the end of the seventeenth century, baffled medical skill, and was regarded with mortal apprehension. The Queen's illness was declared by the doctor in attendance to be measles, but in a day or two the symptoms grew worse. Dr. Radcliffe, the first physician of the day, was hurriedly summoned, and the moment he saw the patient he pronounced the malady to be smallpox.

The Princess Anne just then was in delicate health, but as soon as she heard of the Queen's illness she sent one of her ladies with a message of sympathy, and the request that she might be allowed to visit her. The King was watching by his wife's bed at Kensington, in an agony of fear, when the message was delivered. He sent word that the Princess might expect a reply on the morrow. Next day, accordingly, Lady Derby, who was in close attendance, wrote a civil letter of thanks at the command of the King and Queen, intimating that, as quiet was essential, they hoped the Princess would defer her proposed visit. The letter ended with a personal postscript from Lady Derby, in which she "presented her humble duty" to Anne. As soon as Lady Marlborough read the letter, she felt instinctively that the Queen was not likely to recover. The letter, so she puts it, "made me conclude more than if the College of

Physicians had told me that the disease was mortal."

Every day the Princess sent to inquire, and on one occasion Lady Fitzharding was ushered into the sick-room, and expressed warmly Anne's sympathy with her sister. The Queen made no reply except to utter the cold and laconic reply "Thanks."<sup>1</sup> Mary seems to have known, even when everyone about her professed to think the danger slight, that the end was approaching; for at an early stage of her illness she sat far into the night, looking through the papers in her bureau and throwing them into the fire. She might then have, surely, made some overtures to Anne, her only near relative in the kingdom. Her haughty spirit prevailed, and she was silent.

The Queen died on the 28th of December, 1694. William, only a few minutes before, broken with grief, and almost unconscious, was led out of the room. Her death came as a great surprise, as well as a great sorrow, to the nation. The people mourned for Queen Mary in a more deep and universal sense than ever they had done for Charles II. Many thought that she would survive the King, who was not only considerably older, but had long been a valetudinarian. Not a few deemed that she would in that case marry again, and that a child might be born to her, and would succeed to the throne. But at the age of thirty-three the curtain fell, and the light of William's life went suddenly out, in a grief that was so inconsolable as to make the courtiers tremble for the King's reason.

It was Lord Sunderland who brought about the reconciliation between William and Anne; but even he might not have succeeded—for Lord Portland opposed it on the plea that it would reflect on the Queen's memory—if the heartbroken King had not

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

fixed his hopes on the young Duke of Gloucester, an attachment which was known to no one more fully than Lord Somers, who stood high in the King's confidence. The child who seemed destined to be King of England was the living link between the desolate Court at Kensington and Berkeley House. Anne knew that the King had been devotedly attached to her sister, and she felt all a woman's quick sympathy with him in his loneliness and grief. She was, in truth, always keenly alive to the havoc wrought by death, and her warm heart invariably responded to such appeals. She wrote, expressing her "sincere and hearty sorrow for His Majesty's affliction," and added that she was "as much touched by his misfortune as if she had not been so unhappy as to incur her sister's displeasure."

William was sitting alone, nursing his grief, when Lord Somers came into his presence, and after a long silence ventured to express the hope that, in the presence of so great a calamity, all coldness between His Majesty and the Princess Anne might now cease. The King was too unmanned at the moment to say more than: "My lord, do what you will; I can think of no business."<sup>1</sup> Somers retired with that reply, not without doubt as to its meaning. The King's Dutch favourite, the Earl of Portland, proved anything but a peacemaker at that crisis; and if William, who thought more of his advice as a rule than that of any other man, had listened to his words, reconciliation would have been impossible. But William's better nature asserted itself. He recognized, moreover, that Anne now stood in immediate succession to the throne. So he sent her a gracious message, and, when she waited upon him, told her that henceforth St. James's Palace was at her disposal.

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 42.

Instantly the tide turned, and now, states Lady Marlborough, "it being publicly known that the quarrel was made up, nothing was to be seen but crowds of people of all sorts flocking to Berkeley House to pay their respects to the Prince and Princess. One night at a reception a certain half-witted peer forced a smile to the sad face of Anne by exclaiming: "I hope your Highness will remember that I came to wait upon you when none of this company did."

When the misunderstanding with the Princess had ceased, the King treated Lady Marlborough with extraordinary civility, but she never altered her opinion of him. Her own words may be cited: "After the reconciliation (with Anne), upon any occasion when I happened to be in his way, he was as civil to me as was possible, and the first time he saw me, which was not long after the quarrel was made up, I was waiting upon the Princess as she stood at a drawing-room at St. James's, on one morning he came there to Church. After he had taken the Princess by the hand, he let it go to come back as far as the door in the presence chamber, to the table in the drawing-room, to do me honour. I stood at as much distance as I could, for fear he or anyone else should think I came on any account but to wait upon the Princess, having taken great pains till then to avoid all places where the King was, and I believe I should have continued it but that my Lord Sunderland persuaded me from it."<sup>1</sup> Once His Majesty asked her how she liked Lady Albemarle's English. She, as the wife of his most confidential friend among the Dutch courtiers, stood high in the King's favour. Before Lady Marlborough had time to reply, he added brusquely: "Tell me, and don't flatter her." Lady Marlborough was indignant, for she prided herself on never flattering anybody. "I felt my face grow very hot, and wished

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

mightily that I might have had the liberty to have asked His Majesty why he should think I should flatter my Lady Albemarle, since I should never flatter him."<sup>1</sup> Scarcely any saying of note has come down to us from the lips of William III. "He spoke seldom," was Bishop Burnet's testimony, "and then with a disgusting dryness."

William's mood presently hardened. He treated the Princess henceforth with formal civility, but that was all. He made no attempt to win her regard, and sometimes, even, acted towards her with a lack of respect, keeping her waiting when she came to have audience with him, sometimes for the space of an hour, and making no apology for a slight which "causes some discourse in town."

In the following autumn William returned to England in triumph after the surrender of Namur, and Anne wrote him a warm letter of congratulation, which he did not take the trouble even to acknowledge. Lady Marlborough bridled up at this, but it must not be forgotten, even though the act was churlish, that the King was always taciturn, and had a great aversion to compliments. Meanwhile Anne had taken up her residence at St. James's, and her inseparable companion, Lady Marlborough, went with her. Shortly afterwards the Palace of Whitehall was destroyed by fire, and William's last years were spent at Windsor, or at his favourite place of retreat, Hampton Court.

Marlborough was now taken back into favour, though William never really trusted him. It was said that he was the only man whom the King really feared. He was appointed Governor to the young Duke of Gloucester, a post which he held in conjunction with Bishop Burnet. The prelate's duties were quite clear: he was to superintend the Prince's

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

education. Burnet interpreted his instructions too literally, and overweighted the delicate and highly-strung boy with learning, ancient and modern. Marlborough asked the King what it was expected that he should do, and William replied, with a courtliness which was uncommon to him: "My lord, teach him but to be what you are, and my nephew cannot want accomplishments."<sup>1</sup> Anne's opinion of her sole heir deserves to be quoted: "Though I love him well, I can't brag of his beauty."

It would have been better for the young Duke if he had been more in the open air in Marlborough's company. But the Bishop, who was cordially disliked by the Princess Anne, was determined to turn him into a prodigy of learning. The Duke of Gloucester had a quick, bright mind, charming manners, and a submissive spirit. The Bishop had an autocratic temper, and was wishful that the boy should excel. His poor little pupil made a valiant attempt, under his guidance, to master jurisprudence, constitutional history, the evolution of law, the intricacies of the feudal system, and a score of other subjects, and the outcome was that he died in 1700, at the age of eleven. Lady Marlborough loved the boy, and her hopes for her own son were pinned to him.

The death of the Duke of Gloucester, the only child of the Princess Anne, rendered the Act of Settlement imperative. It became law in 1701, and by its provisions the crown, after Anne, passed to the Electress Sophia of Hanover and her Protestant descendants. The occasion was seized to insert a clause forbidding the Sovereign to leave England without consent of Parliament—a significant tribute to the discontent caused by William's prolonged sojourns abroad.

As the year 1701 proceeded, tidings came of the

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 48.

death of James II., and on its heels the knowledge that Louis XIV., in spite of his pledge at the Peace of Ryswick, had publicly proclaimed the Stuart prince—known in history as the Old Pretender—as the legitimate King of England, under the style and title of James III. William's health was rapidly failing, but, ill as he was, this supreme affront not merely called forth his indignation, but put new life into him, and for the first time in his reign the nation was at his back. It was a challenge to England which could not be ignored. A new Parliament was summoned, and the Whigs, with a great majority, came back to power, eager to uphold the Protestant Succession. The nation was determined that the Act of Settlement should not be set at defiance at the bidding of a foreign autocrat.

William stood ready to measure swords with Louis XIV. He appointed Marlborough Commander-in-Chief, and preparations were pushed forward for the struggle. But on the 20th of February, 1702, the King's horse stumbled on a molehill. The shock, even more than the injury of the fall, was greater than William could withstand, and on the 8th of March the intrepid, if wounded, spirit of William III. passed away. The "sunshiny day," which the Princess Anne had predicted when her own fortunes were lowest, was beginning to dawn, even though the nation realized that with the death of William III. it had lost its far-sighted and sagacious ruler.

England sprang to arms to baffle Louis XIV.'s ambitious scheme, and the War of the Spanish Succession, with its critical vicissitudes and crowning victories, and its vast expenditure of blood and money, was the outstanding event in the glorious annals of the new reign. It is impossible to understand either the political or the military events of this epoch without tracing in broad outline the

baffled negotiations which led to the appeal to the sword.

It was clear to all Europe in the summer of 1698 that the days of Charles II. of Spain were numbered. He was childless, and this raised the question of the succession. There were rival claimants, but the most powerful were Princes of the reigning houses of France and Germany. Louis XIV. had married, in 1659, the Infanta Maria Theresa, daughter of Philip IV., and sister of the monarch whose life was drawing to a close; but both she and her husband had solemnly renounced all claims to the Spanish throne at that time. If blood, however, was to count, the claims of France were paramount; but if they were disallowed, the Emperor Leopold I. of Austria, nephew of Philip IV., stood next, and his claims were not set aside by any formal act of renunciation. The other possible heir was Joseph, Electoral Prince of Bavaria, grandson of Philip IV.'s youngest daughter.

The situation was so critical in the summer of 1698 that both Louis XIV. and Leopold I. recognized that it would be highly impolitic under any circumstances to press their own claims; but neither of them at first abandoned them. Louis renounced his rights in favour of his youngest grandson, Philip, Duke of Anjou, and Leopold, passing over his immediate heir, named his younger son, the Archduke Charles. They then mutually agreed that neither the one Prince nor the other should actually succeed to the throne of Spain. But in both cases compensation was to be given. The Duke of Anjou was to succeed to the Spanish possessions in Naples and Sicily; the Archduke Charles was to obtain Milan. This made the way plain for the third claimant, the young Prince of Bavaria, whose accession would not disturb the balance of power.

The problem was briefly this: If the Duke of Anjou



succeeded, France and Spain would be united. If, on the contrary, the Archduke Charles succeeded, Austria and Spain would be joined. Hence the First Partition Treaty, which was drawn up secretly, but with the knowledge and full approval of William III., in the actual lifetime of the reigning King of Spain, who was not consulted in the matter.

But the ink was scarcely dry upon the parchment, when the unexpected happened. The young Prince of Bavaria was carried off by smallpox in February, 1699, and this untoward event threw the whole scheme into confusion, and rendered imperative the Second Partition Treaty of 1700. This document, drawn up in October of that year, decreed that the Archduke Charles of Austria was to succeed to the greater part of the Spanish dominions, including the Indies and the Netherlands; the Duke of Anjou was to receive Guipuscoa in the North of Spain, and the Two Sicilies, together with Milan, which was to be exchanged for the duchy of Lorraine. But Charles II. of Spain, though his illness was mortal, was still alive. He heard on his death-bed, and with indignation, of the proposed dismemberment of his kingdom, and his last act was to draw up a will, bequeathing all his dominions to the Duke of Anjou. He died in November, 1700, and Louis XIV., with cynical audacity, instantly tore up the Partition Treaty, and claimed the throne of Spain for his grandson, in accordance with the terms of the last will of Charles II., exclaiming: "*Il n'y a plus de Pyrénées !*"

William III., if his hands had not been tied, would at once have challenged this breach of faith. But the Tories were in power in England, and were clamorous that the nation should not be involved in a foreign war. They had compelled the King, after the Peace of Ryswick, not only to dismiss his Dutch troops, but also to put the English army on a peace footing; and

so, greatly though he disliked it, he was forced to recognize the Duke of Anjou as King of Spain. "It grieves me to the soul," were his words, "that almost everyone rejoices that France has preferred the will to the treaty." Louis XIV. knew the temper of the English people perfectly well; his secret agents kept him informed of the Jacobite plots, as well as of the strain on the financial resources of the country, and the growing unpopularity of the King, who was far too much in Holland to please his English subjects. He therefore thought that, as the Spanish Netherlands had passed to his grandson, France could force the Dutch to recognize the validity of the will of Charles II. by seizing the fortresses on the frontier. So he sent an army to the Netherlands to take possession of these strongholds in the name of his grandson, and to hold them until the rights of the new Spanish King were acknowledged by the Dutch.

Public opinion at once changed, and on the 7th of September, 1701, William formed the Grand Alliance of England, Holland, and Germany, the object of which was to snatch the Low Countries from the hands of France, and to hold them as a barrier State to shield Holland from Louis XIV. It also sought to restore the balance of power by winning the Spanish dominions in Italy for Leopold I. This compact became more powerful in the beginning of the following year, when the new kingdom of Prussia threw in its lot with the Grand Alliance, a step which was followed in 1703 by the accession of Portugal, and by the changed attitude of the Duke of Savoy.

James II. died at St. Germain's ten days after the Grand Alliance was signed, on the 6th of September, 1701, and Louis XIV., though pledged up to the hilt by the Peace of Ryswick not to challenge William's rights to the throne of England, at once publicly recognized the heir of St. Germain's as

James III. of England. This crowning insult was not to be borne. William's position instantly changed. His temper changed as well. The nation stood solidly behind him. The War of the Spanish Succession was inevitable. Through the folly of Louis XIV., William of Orange suddenly reached the goal of his ambition, which was to humble the power of France. His health was failing fast, but he pushed forward the preparations for the struggle, and in his last hours he relied on the sword of Marlborough to carry forward, under his sister-in-law and successor, the war which had been forced upon the Grand Alliance. Such was the position of affairs when William III., by that strange irony which so often defeats human ambition, died, at the age of fifty-two, at Kensington Palace, on Sunday, the 8th of March, 1702. Albemarle came back from Holland the day before William passed away, and bending over his dying master told him cheering news. But the King was too ill to pay much heed, and merely whispered in reply: "*Je tire vers ma fin.*" It is significant that the King recommended Marlborough on his death-bed to the Princess who was to succeed him, as "the most proper person in all her dominions to conduct her armies or preside in her councils," describing him, in so many words, as "a man of cool head and a warm heart, fit to encounter the genius of France and strangle her designs of swallowing Europe." William was hailed on his accession to the English throne as the Protestant Deliverer. He died with the knowledge that Europe regarded him as the protagonist in the struggle of the Confederation against France.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE MARLBOROUGHS IN THE NEW REIGN

THE brief but brilliant reign of Queen Anne began and ended on a Sunday; but it does not stand in history as a reign of peace. It was illustrious in war. It was memorable in politics. It was classic in letters. It was an age of remarkable men and wonderful achievements. Those achievements, alike in the world of action and in the world of thought, have turned its annals into one of the most splendid chapters in the history of the nation.

The whole course of Anne's reign was alive with movement and colour. Dramatic and far-reaching incidents marked it. It witnessed the rise of many great reputations, which to this day cast their spell over the imagination of the world. It witnessed the union of England and Scotland, and gave Great Britain an unassailable position in the councils of Europe. The light of genius shines in its records in a manner which was only matched in the splendid reign of Elizabeth. The Stuart dynasty, like the Tudor, ended in a blaze of glory. It was an age which was dazzled with the sword of Marlborough and the satire of Swift, and to which the poetry of Pope, Congreve, and Prior, and the prose of Defoe, Addison, and Steele, lent distinction. It had soldiers and sailors like Peterborough and Rooke—men whose gallant deeds would have given them a commanding place in any epoch which was not dominated by the superlative triumphs of the hero of Blenheim.

The reign, in its art and architecture, recalls the renown which Sir Christopher Wren won by his churches, Sir John Vanbrugh by his palaces, and Sir Godfrey Kneller by his pictures. It could boast of its illustrious master of science, Sir Isaac Newton, and of the great light in philosophy which was extinguished too early in its annals by the death of John Locke. It had statesmen who left an abiding mark on national affairs, like Godolphin, Halifax, Sunderland, Somers, Bolingbroke, and Harley. There was scarcely a direction in which intellect did not assert itself in the service of the State.

Best of all, as the reign ran its course, civil and religious liberty were broadened, social conditions were ameliorated, and the growth of a new public opinion, hostile to oppression and generous towards all that makes a nation free and enlightened, asserted itself, sometimes in spite of, and sometimes because of, the tumult of the times. Short as the difference, in point of time, which divided them, there could scarcely be a more vivid contrast than that which is presented alike in the field of action and of thought by the reign of James II.—brief, broken, and baffled—and that of his daughter, Queen Anne, which swept onward like a river, gaining depth and breadth as it flowed.

Queen Anne was a woman of thirty-seven on that dull Sunday in March, 1702, which brought her to the throne. She possessed the obstinacy, but not the charm, of the Stuarts. She had convictions, and on occasion the courage of them. Her life was blameless, but her outlook was narrow. She was incapable of appreciating the great intellectual movement of her reign. She would have made an excellent wife for a country squire, and have played the part of Lady Bountiful to perfection; for she had a warm heart and an open hand, and no lack of common-sense, and, within limits, a shrewd judgment. But she was

not a distinguished woman, apart from her rank. She had no imagination and no humour, and these are the qualities beyond all others which lend distinction to character. All through her reign she lived in immediate and often in singularly petty affairs; she had no grasp of the great problems at issue, whether domestic or foreign, though she was as keen as a hawk on points of etiquette and ceremony.

Her conduct was determined by two fixed ideas. One was that the Church of England must be maintained at all hazards. The other was that the Whigs were not to be trusted, and were little better than veiled Republicans. Queen Anne, in short, was a good woman, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, who had been placed by circumstances in what was at once an exalted and a difficult position. She honestly tried, according to her lights—they were the reverse of brilliant—to live up to her position. But she did not shine in the personal sense, and her glory, such as it was, was simply the reflected light of the great men who served her with passionate devotion. She possessed, what none of the Stuarts lacked, an instinct—the perception of quality in men; and so long as she gave them her confidence, and with it a more or less free hand, the interests of her kingdom at home and abroad were secure. Like all people, however, of small minds, Anne was quick to take offence, and when she took it was too apt to hug it to her bosom. She seldom acted on her own initiative, for she was the reverse of self-reliant; and when she did so, in the majority of cases, she went wrong. Her glory consists in the opportunity which her reign gave to people of far greater force of character to shape the affairs of State.

She carried herself well on all occasions of ceremony, for, though not beautiful, she was comely,

displayed a happy union of dignity and simplicity, and possessed a singularly musical voice. The nation trusted her, and not without reason; but from first to last she scarcely trusted herself, except when her temper was aroused or her prejudices were assailed—circumstances under which she became headstrong and implacable.

Anne was haunted all through her reign by secret misgivings concerning her treatment of her dead father, and the pretensions of the young half-brother whom she had never seen—the Prince whom Louis had proclaimed, amid a premature blare of trumpets, as James III. of England. Lady Marlborough knew perfectly that “James III.,” as the Jacobites called the Pretender, was the real son of the late King, as her sister, Lady Tyrconnel, was present at his birth, on the 10th of June, 1688.<sup>1</sup> But Anne, though she had acquiesced in the coming of William and Mary as a political necessity, was never quite easy in her own mind, especially after the absurd Warming-Pan Plot had been refuted. Outwardly she bowed with a good grace to the Act of Settlement, though she did not relish the advent of the Elector of Hanover as her successor. If she had lived another six months—so great were her sympathies with her own family in her closing days—the House of Hanover might never have come to the throne.

The Queen's first speech from the throne touched the right note. She claimed to be “entirely English.” It was a welcome announcement, for William had been ostentatiously Dutch, her young brother in exile was practically French, and the House of Hanover, which was looming on the horizon, was German to its finger-tips. Many important questions were in the air, but Queen Anne, in her initial address to

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

the nation, seized on the two which were most pressing. One related to home policy, and the other to foreign. The first was to bring about the union of England with Scotland, which William had recommended to Parliament within a few days of his death; the other was to encourage the Allies of England to "reduce the exorbitant power of France," which was also one of the unfulfilled purposes of William. The policy which ruled the State in the reign of Anne was determined by that programme. Both parts of it were accomplished. The Union of England and Scotland became law in 1707. Marlborough's victories, on which an imperfect seal was set by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, gave the *coup de grâce* to the pretensions of France. The last was the most urgent, and it accordingly came first.

Marlborough had felt the death of James II. keenly. He was always a strong adherent of the House of Stuart, and in his secret heart had never relished the advent of William of Orange, even when driven by the peril to the Protestant Faith to lend his support to the Revolution of 1688. It is probable that in his eyes William represented at best the inevitable, and he never quite forgave the King his imprisonment in the Tower, and the tardy amends which were made to him when the accusations levelled at him were proved to be false. In the closing months of the King's reign Marlborough was in dejection. William kept him in Holland, when Marlborough thought his place was in England, since critical times were at hand. He knew perfectly well that there was a Whig plot afoot, the aim of which was to pass over the right of the Princess Anne to the throne in favour of the Elector of Hanover. He was aware, also, that the motive which prompted it was mingled fear and jealousy of himself. He declared that he would oppose such a scheme to the uttermost, and



exclaimed, with a vehemence which from his lips was not common: "By God, if ever they attempt it, we shall walk over their bellies!"

Louis XIV. flattered himself that the Grand Alliance would come to nothing on the death of William. In March, 1702, he was therefore in the mood of a man who imagines that Providence has suddenly interposed on his behalf. He breathed freely when the tidings came; a great load was off his shoulders. The man of all others who withstood him and threatened to foil his ambitious schemes had gone to his account. But the Whig plot collapsed. Anne was crowned on St. George's Day, the 23rd of April, 1702, amid the rejoicings of the people.

Anne was so crippled with gout on the day of the coronation that she could scarcely support the ceremony. After that long and solemn ordeal the Queen attended the banquet in Westminster Hall. She arrived in her sedan-chair at St. James's Palace in the evening, greatly exhausted. Prince George of Denmark, who was in high spirits, was in no mood for retiring. At length the Lord Chamberlain ventured to draw his attention to Her Majesty's weariness, and hinted that it might be as well if he proposed retirement. "I propose!" exclaimed the Prince. "I cannot; I am Her Majesty's subject, and have sworn homage to her to-day. I shall do naught but what she commands me." The Queen was equal to the occasion, and replied, with a smile: "Then, as that is the case, and I am very tired, I do command you, George, to come to bed."<sup>1</sup>

So the great day ended for the Queen, though London was ablaze with illuminations and the people were cheering half the night in the streets. Anne's scruples about the succession had been set at rest by the death of her father a few months earlier.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

So far as her brother, the young Prince at St. Germain, was concerned, Anne at this time had a lingering doubt about his legitimacy, and that rendered her own course more clear. "She told me," states the Duchess, "that she was not sure the Prince of Wales was her brother, and that it was not practicable for him to come here without ruin to religion and the country."<sup>1</sup>

The Grand Alliance held good. Louis had not reckoned with Marlborough, and before a short month had run its course England declared war with France, on the 4th of May, 1702.

The accession of Anne not merely changed Marlborough's fortunes, but gave him instantly a position of unique ascendancy. He was fifty-two, the age at which William had died, when the great work of his life dawned suddenly upon him. Lady Marlborough, ten years younger, stood on the steps of the throne, and her influence with the new Queen was paramount. They still addressed each other in countless letters as "Dear Mrs. Morley" and "Dear Mrs. Freeman," and were kissing kind. Queen Anne, in truth, reigned over all her subjects save one, and that was Mrs. Freeman, who, on the principle that character and will count, reigned over her. Anne in her hands was as pliable as wax, for as yet nothing had occurred to ruffle their relationships.

The whole nation felt that the great emergency of the war could only be met by Marlborough. He was the strong man armed, who came to the front by virtue of his military genius, as well as by the confidence which the Queen reposed in him, and who honoured him with her trust when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb and all seemed against him. He was given the supreme command, and the Order of the Garter was conferred upon him. Lady Marl-

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

borough was appointed Mistress of the Robes, and, odd as the title sounds for a woman, Groom of the Stole. She was also made Ranger of Windsor Park, in succession to William's favourite, the Earl of Portland, and the Old Lodge in Windsor Park was given her by the Queen, because years before she had once admired the house and the beauty of its situation.

Marlborough pressed forward the preparations for the war which had dropped from William's dying hands, and, with 40,000 troops, embarked for Holland in the summer of 1702. He crossed the Meuse in July, and in the autumn took, in quick succession, Venloo, Ruremonde, and Liège. The result of the campaign was that Marlborough was master of the Meuse up to the great town of Liège, which surrendered, after a short siege, on the 29th of October, when hostilities ceased for the winter. He had driven the French back, and had made a wedge the apex of which was Liège, and the base the Rhine, which cut them off from the lower valley of that river, and so guarded the Dutch frontier at one of the most dangerous points of attack. All through the hot days of that anxious summer Marlborough was continually on the march, engaged, as he told the surly Dutch deputies when he crossed the Meuse in July, in delivering Holland from its "troublesome neighbours." He had no leisure for personal correspondence—a circumstance which piqued the Duchess. All he could do was to snatch a moment for a hasty note to her on the 29th of May, 1702:

"I do assure you upon my soul," he writes, "that I had much rather that the whole world should go wrong than that you should be uneasy, for the quiet of my life depends only on your kindness."<sup>1</sup>

It is strange to find a man who was as patient

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

as he was brave making apologies for his temper to his exacting wife :

“ My temper may make you and myself sometimes very uneasy, but when I am alone and I find you kind, if you knew the true quiet I have in my mind, you would then be convinced of my being entirely yours, and that it is in no other power in this world to make me happy but yourself.”<sup>1</sup>

At a later stage of the campaign, when he was following the French army, which had retreated across the Meuse, and was trying to inspire the Hanoverians and Prussians in other parts of the theatre of war with his own energy, he writes again, on the 6th of July :

“ We have now very hot weather, which I hope will ripen the fruit at St. Albans. When you are there pray think how happy I should be, to be out of this crowd and walking alone with you. No ambition can make amends for my being from you. . . . I am on horseback or answering letters all day long, for besides the business of the army I have letters from the Hague and all places where Her Majesty has Ministers, so that if it were not for my zeal for her service I should certainly desert.”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes Lady Marlborough capitulated only after a siege more troublesome and protracted than that of Liège, and then her husband had to qualify his ardent expressions : “ Nothing can equal the happiness of my being with you when you are kind.” In one of his letters, written on the 23rd of July, 1702, he says :

“ The French having by their march of yesterday abandoned the Meuse, we shall for some time have rest, so that you will be sure to hear regularly from me. You say nothing to me how the election went at St. Albans, nor how my garden is, which I have not forgotten.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Coxe, “ *Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough*,” vol. i., p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Blenheim Papers.

How much that rest was needed is clear from what he tells her of a typical day in his life: "Up at five o'clock in the morning to spend twelve hours in the saddle," with despatches to send which kept him pen in hand far into the night. She replied in depressed mood on the 31st of July, giving a bad account of her health, and going on petulantly to hint that perhaps her letters might be unnecessary, since he had not time to read them. Lord Marlborough's answer is dated the 10th of August, 1702. He urges her to consult a doctor, and advises "fisick," and says that bleeding might relieve; "for I believe that a great deal of your illness comes from having a great quantity of blood." Then he turns to what she had said about the neglect of her letters, and does so in a sentence which reveals in a flash the character of the man:

"I do assure you that your letters are so welcome to me that, if they should come in the time I was expecting the enemy to charge me, I could not forbear reading them."<sup>1</sup>

On Marlborough's return to London at the close of the year, he received the thanks of Parliament for "retrieving"—so the phrase ran—the honour of the English nation. In his reply he modestly turned the compliment by declaring that his successes were due to His Majesty's happy conduct and the bravery of his troops.

Marlborough was nearly captured by the enemy at the close of the campaign. He was sailing down the Meuse from Maestricht, when the French stopped the boat and searched it. He only escaped recognition by the prompt action of an English soldier, who slipped into his hand, when the French were demanding to know who he was, an old passport which in the confusion and darkness was not ques-

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

tioned. One of the most common charges brought against Marlborough is that of parsimony. He was not extravagant; at times he was, for a man of his rank, almost frugal in his habits; but the charge of inordinate avarice was the slander of his enemies. He gave the man who had saved him £50 a year, and that, of course, represented a much larger sum than it does to-day.

The Earl of Athlone, one of the bravest and most skilful of William's Dutch soldiers, was the first to recognize Marlborough's ability in these rapid military operations.

"The success of this campaign is solely due to this incomparable chief, since I confess that I, serving as second in command, opposed in all circumstances Lord Marlborough's opinions and proposals."<sup>1</sup>

Athlone gained his title in the Irish Rebellion, and was at William's side at the Battle of the Boyne. He was Marlborough's lieutenant at the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession, but died before Blenheim was fought. It was this rapid and successful campaign which brought Marlborough the dukedom.

Marlborough, though flattered by the proposed honour, declared that his position would make it difficult for him to sustain the dignity of such rank. He thought moreover that, as the War of the Spanish Succession was just beginning, such a distinction might very well be reserved until peace had been concluded. But Antoine Heinsius, Grand Pensionary of Holland, was of another opinion. Heinsius maintained that Marlborough ought to be made a Duke at once, "since it would be no other than an act of justice on the part of the Queen, and do her good with all the Princes abroad." Marl-

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 100.

borough, in an unpublished letter, describes the argument between them:

"I urged upon him the trouble it might bring upon the Queen by severall familys pressing to have the same tytle. He made me for answer that it would not have that effect, if it were done now, since it was visable to all the world it was done as a reward for the good services of this campagne, soe that it would concern noe body but myself, but if were done upon a long deliberation, those familys might expect to be considered. The last thing I urged to him, and which is very true, was that I should make a worse figure in England for being a Duke than as I am, till I had an estate for itt. He sayd the Queen's kindness was such that I need not doubt a fortune, and that whatever was done at this time for my fortune as well as tytle wou'd be without envy, since all the people were pleased with what I had done. He farther urged to mee that it was not reasonable to expect ever to have soe much success in any other campagne as in this, soe that he ended in begging mee (to accept it) for the good of the Comon Cause, the Queen's service, and my own sake."<sup>1</sup>

If Marlborough had waited until the end of the war, he never would have received the dukedom, for his enemies had compassed his downfall. Heinsius, on the other hand, was curiously mistaken in thinking that his friend was not likely to have "soe much success in any other campagne." Marlborough was only on the threshold of his splendid triumphs as a soldier. The great battles which crushed the ascendancy of France, made England glorious, and altered the balance of power in Europe, were still to be added to the proud list of his victories.

Lady Marlborough urged delay. She realized that the Queen's offer as it stood, though gracious, was a barren honour. But the Queen would take no denial. Her letter—it is dated "St. James's Palace, Thursday,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

October 22"—could not well have been more complimentary:

"I have had this evening the satisfaction of my dear Mrs. Freeman's of yesterday, for which I give you many thanks, and though I think it is a long long time since I saw you, I do not desire you to come one minute sooner to towne than it is easy to you but will waite with patience for the happy hour, and only beg when you doe come, you will send for a coach, and not make use of a chaise. Lord Treasurer intends to send you a copy of the Address from the House of Lords wh. is to be given me to-morrow, and that gives me an opportunity of mentioning a thing that I did not intend to do yet. It is very uneasy to your poor unfortunate faithfull Morley to think she has so very little in her power to shew how truly sensible I am of my Lord Marlborough's kindness, especially at a time when he deserves all that a Rich Crowne would give, but since there is nothing else at this time, I hope you will give me leave as soon as he comes to make him a Duke. I know, my dear Mrs. Freeman does not care for anything of that kind, nor am I satisfied with it because it does not enough express the value I have for Mr. Freeman, nor nothing ever can how passionately I am yours, my dear Mrs. Freeman."<sup>1</sup>

The original document is at Blenheim, and is endorsed in the Duchess's autograph in her old age: "Queen's Letter when she made Lord Marlb. a Duke." Her own written comments on this mark of the Queen's favour are also in existence. They were evidently written years afterwards, and perhaps only a sentence or two need be quoted. The paper is undated:

"I believe there are very few in the world that did not believe me very much pleased with the increase of honour the Queen gave Lord Marlborough when he commanded the Army at Her coming to the Crown. Perhaps 'tis ridiculous—at least that so few people will believe—that I would not mention it but to those that I could show the original letters to,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.



and if there be any truth in a mortal it was so uneasy to me that when I read the letter first upon it, I let it drop out of my hand, and was for some minutes like one that had received the news of a death of one of their dear friends. I was so easy for anything of that kind, having before, all that was of any use by which 'tis plain I have no great taste for grandeur."

She adds that all she saw in it was a matter of precedence, or, as she puts it quaintly, a mere "going in at a door, and when a rule is settled, I like as well to follow five hundred as one."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Marlborough lost no time in his acknowledgments of so great a mark of approval. Writing to Lady Marlborough from The Hague on the 2nd of November, he says:

"You know I am very ill at compliments, but I have a heart full of gratitude: therefore pray say all you can to the Queen for her extraordinary goodness to me. As you have let me have your thoughts as to the Dukedom, you shall have mine in short, since I shall have the happiness of being with you so soon, when I may advise with you at large on this matter. But be assured that I shall have a mind to nothing, but as it may be easy to you. I do agree with you that we ought not to wish for a greater title, till we have a better estate. Your other objection is also very just, that this promotion might bring great solicitations upon the Queen, which I am sure I would not give occasion for. The Queen's goodness in being desirous to establish my family, answers the first, since that may be done this winter; for I agree with you, that it should be done before the title."<sup>2</sup>

At length all difficulties were removed by the Queen's generosity, and the great soldier was duly created Duke of Marlborough in December, 1702.

At home, Godolphin, on the recommendation of Marlborough, was appointed Lord High Treasurer on the 6th of May, 1702, and he became the head of a combined Ministry of Tories and Whigs. He stood

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 102.

high in Anne's personal regard, and came to power, at the age of fifty-seven, with a reputation at once for ability and intrigue. He had been Master of the Robes in the reign of Charles II., and that witty monarch had said: "Sidney Godolphin is never in the way, and never out of the way." He played a difficult part in the reign of James II., and was one of his last adherents. He was Lord Chamberlain to Mary of Modena, and was credited with a Platonic attachment to her, with whom he constantly corresponded when she was in exile. At first he was anything but *persona grata* at the Court of William III., and was implicated in Sir John Fenwick's Jacobite conspiracy, but in 1700 he was recalled to William's councils, in spite of the good reason which he had given for previous distrust.

Godolphin was the confidential ally of Marlborough, and the latter was quick to see—personal friendship apart—that, if military operations were to be pursued with energy abroad, it was imperative that a strong man should be at the Treasury to provide the sinews of war. Godolphin was a consummate man of business. He possessed a singularly level head, and was an acknowledged master of finance. Marlborough, in spite of his personal charm and a certain expansiveness of speech, which was in reality strictly guarded, was not a man of many friends.

Voltaire declared that Marlborough was equally qualified for the field and for the Cabinet, and that he did as much mischief to France by the wisdom of his head as by the power of his sword. He lays stress on the Duke's instinctive discernment of character, and says that he could discover men's designs by their looks and gestures. Lord Chesterfield says that, notwithstanding his gentleness, no man living was more conscious of his position than the Duke, nor maintained his dignity better. He possessed extra-

ordinary patience, and used himself to say: "Patience will overcome all things." Lord Chesterfield asserted that Marlborough could deny a request with so much grace that men often left his presence so delighted with their reception as to forget their chagrin. He carried himself with the ease of perfect breeding. He always listened attentively to whatever was said to him.

At Court, as well as in camp, the magic of his personality prevailed. Obstacles of all kinds vanished from his path, for he had an extraordinary power of appeal, as well as knowledge of men; but he seldom revealed himself, and even his most trusted subordinates in war knew but little of his plans, and often had to move in the dark. Godolphin alone was his bosom friend. He knew more of his mind than anyone else; but on critical occasions it sometimes happened that did not amount to much, for Marlborough fell back on silence whenever he was about to strike a decisive blow. Godolphin used to say that he always knew when great tidings were coming from abroad, because the Duke's last letter, though vague, was written in high spirits.

Godolphin was a sort of father confessor to the Duchess. She held him in high regard, turned to him in all sorts of difficulties, and often bowed to his advice when her temper was least accommodating. He was not merely a master of finance; he was adroit in the use of the oiled feather. If Marlborough learnt the art of war, as is commonly supposed, from Turenne, the Duchess assuredly conquered the mysteries of finance as the apt pupil of Godolphin. The Duke never lost a battle, however desperate; the Duchess was never tripped up by her public accounts, however complicated. Godolphin initiated her into her duties as Mistress of the Robes, and when the Duke was abroad the Lord Treasurer was the only man in the kingdom who had any real influence with

her. He was an astute, wary, dispassionate statesman, worthy to stand at the helm of affairs, and, though his personal character was not exalted, his financial integrity was unassailable. There is truth in the assertion that the Ministry of which Godolphin and Marlborough were the leading spirits was "one of the most glorious in English history."<sup>1</sup> One reason why the Duchess placed implicit confidence in Godolphin was his unfaltering loyalty to the Duke; another was the common bond, which by this time had arisen, between them through the marriage of their children.

Lady Henrietta Churchill, eldest daughter of the Duke and Duchess, married Lord Rialton, only son of the Earl of Godolphin, in 1698, at the age of eighteen. She possessed the good looks of the family, but was perhaps not as beautiful as her sisters. She was endowed with her mother's high temper and strong will, though she did not share either her sense of duty or her shrewd common-sense. It was not a great marriage, for Godolphin was always a poor man, and Marlborough, apart from the fact that he had a large family to provide for, and had fixed his ambition on his son, was by no means affluent. He gave his daughter a marriage portion of £5,000, and the Princess of Denmark, always open-handed, though sometimes not generous in her judgments, insisted on adding a like sum. She would have made her gift £10,000 if Mrs. Freeman would have allowed her.

All the daughters of Marlborough married young. Lady Anne was only seventeen, but was so sedate in bearing that she looked older, when, in 1700, she became the bride of Lord Spencer, son and heir of another of her father's old friends, Robert, second Earl of Sunderland. Lord Spencer's mother was Lady Dorothea Sidney, who, before her marriage to Lord

<sup>1</sup> Lecky's "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. i., p. 48.

Sunderland, had been the "Saccharissa" of Waller's impassioned verse. Marlborough, though he had a great regard for Lord and Lady Sunderland, was averse to the match. Lord Spencer was a widower, and moreover a pronounced Whig; whilst the great soldier's political sympathies, so far as he revealed them, were with the Tories. The Duchess, however, was bent on the marriage, and in matters domestic she always had her own way. She sympathized, even more than she thought it advisable to show, with Lord Spencer's views; and as Lord Godolphin, who certainly did not share them, threw his influence into the same scale, the Duke gave his consent.

He might well have hesitated. Lady Anne, who was as good as she was beautiful, was little more than a child, and was certain to lack no suitors of equal or more exalted rank. Marlborough delighted in her society. She was the most dutiful of daughters and the sunshine of his home, and he was in no haste to be deprived of her bright presence. Her loveliness had already taken many hearts by storm, and had even found its way into print. Addison makes a graceful allusion to her charm: "There is a brave soldier's daughter in town that by her eye has been the death of more than ever her father made fly before him." She adopted the views of her husband with so much ardour that she became known in society as the "Little Whig," and was a reigning toast at political banquets.

Lady Elizabeth Churchill, third daughter of the Duke and Duchess, was almost cruelly young—a girl of fifteen—when she followed the example of her sisters. Her hand was sought in marriage by Scroop Egerton, the fourth Earl of Bridgewater, and they were married in 1702. He was Master of the Horse to Prince George of Denmark, and on the accession of George I. was created first Duke of Bridgewater.

Her mother cared more for Lady Bridgewater than any of her other daughters, perhaps because she was the most submissive. She was universally beloved, and, according to the Duchess, had a perfect mind and many accomplishments. She died at twenty-six, as the reign of Anne was ending.

The Princess Anne was as generous to her as to her sister. She wrote, when the wedding was at hand :

“ My Lord Bridgewater being in haste to be married, I cannot any longer delay telling my dear Mrs. Freeman what I have intended a great while, that I hope she will now give me leave to do what I had a mind to do when dear Lady Harriet was married. Let me speak to Lord Treasurer about it, when I see him, that your poor unfortunate faithful Morley may not be any occasion of delay to other people’s happiness.”<sup>1</sup>

The use of the word “ unfortunate ” in Anne’s description of herself has in it a touch of pathos. After the death of her son, the Duke of Gloucester, she always so described herself in her letters to Mrs. Freeman. The Princess again proposed a gift of £10,000; half that sum was accepted, and Marlborough, as in the case of Lady Harriet, added a like amount.

The Duchess’s only remaining daughter was Lady Mary. She was the most beautiful of the Churchill sisters, and held a peculiar place in the Duke’s affection. His letters from abroad contain tender allusions to her. In appearance she resembled her father, and in her moods of tempestuous gainsaying her mother. The Duchess never seems to have understood either of her daughters who inherited her own temperament. With Lady Henrietta and Lady Mary she was almost as constantly at war as the Duke was with the French, though, unlike him, she was not always victorious.

As a further mark of her favour, Her Majesty

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, “ Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. i., p. 111.

appointed Lady Sunderland and Lady Monthermer Ladies-in-Waiting. These alliances heightened the influence of the Duchess, and also, if that were possible, of the Duke. But midway between the marriages of Lady Elizabeth and Lady Mary he was called to endure a supreme and irrevocable loss in the death of the Marquis of Blandford. The only sorrow he ever occasioned his father came then; it destroyed for Marlborough the dream of his life.

The Marquis of Blandford was educated at Eton, and he afterwards proceeded to King's College, Cambridge, where he was placed under the care of Mr. Francis Hare. He was a youth of unusual promise, amiable, quick-witted, and high-principled. It seemed as if a great career was before him. There is a portrait of him painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller. It depicts him as a handsome lad of manly bearing, with good features and fine eyes. He was like the Duchess rather than the Duke, and she was passionately devoted to him. When he was a child he was much in the company of the young Duke of Gloucester, and his mother cherished the hope that they would grow up together and become life-long friends. But neither of them was destined to live to manhood. After the Duke of Gloucester's death, Marlborough's son was sent to the University, and was frequently the guest of Lord Godolphin, who had an establishment at Newmarket. That statesman took an almost paternal interest in the youth, and there are letters of his at Blenheim, written to the Duchess, which reveal his impressions of her son.

Godolphin speaks of him as "very tractable and good-humoured," pays a handsome compliment to his good looks, and adds:

"I assure you, without flattery and partiality, that Blandford is not only the best-natured and most agreeable, but the most free-thinking and reasonable

creature that one can imagine for his age. He has twenty pretty questions and requests, but I will not trouble you with pictures until I have the honour of seeing you.”<sup>1</sup>

There is also a letter from Blandford himself, written to the Duke in the summer of 1702:

“ I would have writ to my mama, but that by what she said to me in her letter I am afraid she will never thoroughly forgive me, which has grieved me so much that I cannot tell how to write till I have some hopes of being friends with my dear mama. Hoping my dear papa will be so kind as to intercede for me with mama, and be persuaded that nobody can be more heartily sorry for having done amiss than your dutyfull son Blandford.”<sup>2</sup>

The nature of his offence—probably some boyish escapade—is not known; but that simple letter reveals his sensitive nature, and incidentally the haughty temper of the Duchess. It was written in the last summer of his short life. Soon after he went back to Cambridge in the autumn of 1702, an outbreak of smallpox filled both the town and the University with alarm. Towards the close of the Michaelmas term, Blandford, who was not looking well, was invited to Newmarket by Lord Godolphin, to be out of the way of the epidemic. The Duchess by this time was full of concern about him. She proposed that he should return home. But Lord Godolphin reassured her. Travel in those days was difficult, and the youth was better in the bracing air of Newmarket.

“ What you write,” so runs Lord Godolphin’s reply, “ is extremely just and reasonable, and, though the smallpox has been in the town, yet he, going into no house but mine, will, I hope, be more defended from it by air and riding, without violent exercise, than he could probably be anywhere else.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



After Christmas, Blandford went to King's College, to the care of Dr. Hare; but early in January he sickened, and it soon became plain that his malady was the dreaded disease. The Duchess hastened to Cambridge, and, not content with local medical advice, immediately sent to London, as fast as messages could go, for further skill. Queen Anne, who was attached to her dead son's playmate, at once sent her own physicians in the royal coaches.

The disease ran its course, and the patient steadily grew weaker, in spite of all that skill and care could do for him. Marlborough had remained behind, anxiously alert and restless for tidings. His messages to his wife show how great was the strain:

"I am so troubled at the sad condition this poor child seems to be in that I know not what to do. I pray God to give you some comfort in this great affliction. If you think anything under Heaven can be done, pray let me know it, or if you think my coming can be of the least use, let me know it. I beg I may hear as often as 'tis possible, for I have no thought but what is at Cambridge."<sup>1</sup>

Later in the same day he wrote again, evidently after the arrival of a letter the reverse of reassuring:

"I hope the doctors were with you early this morning. If we must be so unhappy as to lose this poor child, I pray God enable us both to behave ourselves with that resignation which we ought to do. If this uneasiness which I lie under should last long, I think I could not live. For God's sake, if there be any hopes of recovering, let me know it."<sup>2</sup>

When that letter arrived there were no hopes. The need for perfect quietude was over; the youth, who had made a valiant struggle for his life, was

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers. See also Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> Blenheim Papers.

dying. The Duke was summoned, and on the day he left Queen Anne wrote to the Duchess:

"I am extream glad that the Duke of Marl: is gon to my dear Mrs. Freeman, and I writt this to desire you would keep him with you till you are easy about dear Lord Blandford—Christ Jesus grant he may do well and preserve you and yours from all sad accidents."<sup>1</sup>

The Duke arrived only in time to witness the end, on the morning of Saturday, the 20th of February, 1704. When the blow fell, the Queen's sympathy found swift expression:

"I writt this morning with a pretty good heart to my dear Mrs. Freeman, and now I do it with as heavy a one, having seen a dismal account of dear Lord Blandford and with it an excuse to me, which was not at all necessary to your poor unfortunate faithful Morley, who is far too sensible of your condition to expect a letter. Chryst Jesus comfort and support you under this terrible affliction, and it is His mercy alone that can do it."<sup>2</sup>

Lord Blandford was buried in the beautiful chapel of King's College, and his stately monument records the passionate grief of his parents. He was only seventeen, but, though so young, was already eager to buckle on a sword and follow his father to the war. The Duchess would have none of it, and bade him wait.

Dr. Hare from that time onwards became one of the closest friends of the Duke. He made him Chaplain-General to the Forces in Flanders, and he was present in that capacity at the Battle of Blenheim. When Marlborough's star was declining, it was Dr. Hare who answered Swift's bitter accusations, set forth in the famous pamphlet, "The Conduct of the Allies." He ultimately became Bishop of Chichester, and long outlived the Duke. It was his

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

ambition to write the history of Marlborough's campaigns; but though he left considerable material in manuscript, his purpose, unhappily, was never fulfilled. He died in 1740, four years before the mother of his old pupil.

The Duchess always treated him with marked respect. He was a frequent guest both at the Old Lodge, Windsor, and at Blenheim, and he was almost the only man who had the courage, in her hard, disillusioned old age, to tell her the truth.

All things in the public sense were going well with the Marlboroughs when the terrible blow of Lord Blandford's death befell them. The Duke stood on the threshold of his great victories; the Duchess, secure in the affection of the Queen, was on the threshold of her unique ascendancy at Court. The flowing tide was with them, but this bolt from the blue plunged them at once into the extremity of grief. Queen Anne, who knew only too well the bitterness of the loss of an only son, did everything in her power, with womanly tenderness, to alleviate their grief. It opened her own wounds afresh, and the two women wept together in the fellowship of common loss. The Duchess seemed inconsolable. It almost looked as if she must lose her reason, so great were her paroxysms of weeping. When this tempest of tears had at last spent its force, she dressed herself meanly in black, and, so attired, haunted the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, sitting on the stone seats there, with downcast head so as not to court observation. Her only wish was to be left alone, and no words of consolation appealed to her. The Duke felt the loss of his son quite as keenly, but he bowed to the inscrutable will of Providence, and, summoning his great powers of self-command, addressed himself to the supreme responsibilities of his position.







JOHN CHURCHILL, MARQUIS OF BLANDFORD.

From a picture by Kneller



## CHAPTER VIII

### A CONFLICT OF TEMPERAMENTS

THE position of the Duchess of Marlborough in the new reign stands unrivalled in the annals of the English Court. Mrs. Freeman could do no wrong; the Queen adored her; she shaped the whispers of the Throne. The world was at her feet; statesmen and diplomatists paid her marked attention and ran to open doors for her; great ladies at Kensington and Windsor, who had flaunted her in the days of William and Mary, were eager to catch her glance, and flattered if she stopped for a moment in the drawing-room to exchange civilities with them. Everyone recognized that she was not merely Mistress of the Robes, but virtually Mistress of Queen Anne. She held in her hands all kinds of preferment, and was the one lady in the land whom it was impossible to ignore in any attempt to gain royal favour.

The Duchess had great qualities—qualities which have been overshadowed unduly by her blazing indiscretions. The world is always eager to seize upon the weak aspects of a great reputation, and Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, has had scant justice done to her on the page of history. Half-truths in any judgment of character are always more difficult to refute than actual falsehoods, and she has suffered accordingly. She has been represented as a scheming, hard, masterful woman, implacable and selfish to the last degree. There is just enough truth in that



indictment to make it plausible, and many writers, who did not relish either her personal ascendancy or her politics, have found her guilty of high crimes and misdemeanours which for the most part only existed in their lively imaginations, and have done so with the aid of all the resources of malice and rhetoric. The world's judgment, in consequence, has been coerced into the acceptance of such a verdict, and in process of time it has been allowed to pass with scarcely a challenge. It is idle to deny that the Duchess was hard and remorseless, and the logic of facts compels the admission that she was implacable. But she was not an intriguing woman in the usual acceptation of the term; and if she had been as selfish as is commonly supposed—all men are selfish more or less—there would not stand to her credit as many generous deeds as can readily be cited.

What are the great qualities that can be urged on her behalf? The answer to that can be stated in a few words. The Duchess of Marlborough was strictly honest in a notoriously venal age. It was customary in the days of the Stuarts to accept bribes from people who were ambitious of official preferment. She declared that she disdained to follow the usual practice. She made that statement in print when there were people alive who could have shamed her if it were untrue, and, though she had many bitter enemies, it was not contradicted. Queen Anne herself towards the end of her reign, when evil tongues had divided them, made it plain that, whatever the faults of the Duchess in her eyes might be, she was at least faithful to the high trust reposed in her. She had a keen sense of public duty, not only in such a direction, but in all, and she never spared herself in the discharge of it.

There were many flatterers about the Court, but it never occurred to the most censorious of her critics

to accuse the Duchess of such a fault. Her temptation—she yielded to it too often for her own advantage—lay in exactly the opposite direction. She possessed courage to the point of audacity, and shrewd common-sense, and both were always at the service of the Crown. She was also endowed to a conspicuous degree with force and discrimination of character—qualities which were certainly needed in the reign of Anne, since the Queen was deficient in both respects. Historians have descanted on the haughty temper of the Duchess, but have said next to nothing about her warm heart or the provocation she encountered. When such writers have spoken of her independence of judgment and self-reliance, they have borrowed examples from her more defiant moods, forgetful that such traits came also into play under less dramatic conditions.

The Duchess knew her own capacity; she had mentally pitted herself against the people around her, notably the Duchess of Somerset, Her Grace of Shrewsbury, and Lady Fitzharding. Mrs. Freeman had brains, and was a woman of the world, well versed in its affairs. Her great weakness lay in headlong and impetuous speech, in mortal antipathies—which if she had been more selfish and calculating she would have concealed—and in faults of temperament, which made havoc of her peace and brought about her undoing, and in the end that of the Duke. She had infinite tact in small matters, but it failed her on critical occasions, and tact—more is the pity of it—is at times of greater account than talent. She was so strong, so self-possessed, so conscious of her powers, that she made enemies by a haughty glance, a gesture of impatience, a hasty word. Towards the close of her life, the Duchess said that she “hated herself” because she had once misjudged one of the statesmen of Anne’s reign. That statesman

was Nottingham. She allowed herself great liberty of utterance, and was too clever herself to realize the manner in which she made stupid people wince. Conscious that she was steering a straightforward course, she never made allowance for those whose conduct was crooked, but cultivated, on the contrary, a candour of speech that to others was disconcerting and galling, and which at times was as uncalled for as it was exasperating.

But, when all this is admitted, the Duchess was more than the loyal and devoted servant of Queen Anne; she was the jealous and vigilant defender of the Protestant Succession. The cause of civil and religious liberty in England at that epoch owes a debt to her which has never been properly acknowledged. As for the rest, she steadied the hand which held the sceptre in the most dramatic years of a reign which was fraught with great issues.

There is a famous picture at Blenheim which represents the Duchess of Marlborough and Lady Fitzharding playing a game of chance. It is by Sir Godfrey Kneller, and is a brilliant example of that master's art. The Duchess, in the full bloom of her loveliness, is sitting in a graceful and negligent attitude studying her cards. One wonders how the painter came to portray her in that pose. She has come down to posterity, on his glowing canvas, in critical and thoughtful mood: she is evidently counting the cost before she throws her card. She has come down to posterity on the page of history in a different light—as a bold and impetuous player in the game of life, who seldom studied the cards or counted the cost, and was sometimes defiant even of the rules of the game.

The Duchess of Marlborough had many shining qualities, and, when she liked, she was bewitching. But patience was not her strong point; generosity

of judgment was her "strange work," and the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit was denied her. She was a great woman, more forceful and quite as illustrious as any in English history; but her place in the national annals would have been still more commanding if she had been less intent on dominating others, and more eager to rule her own imperious spirit.

The rest of the story will fail in the telling if this judgment of her character, in its lights and shadows alike, is not amply proved by the qualities yet to be recorded in the crowded years of her ascendancy, as well as in the tumult of her shadowed but indomitable old age, when she was at war with herself and the world.

Government by great families was a reality in the reign of Anne, and the alliances which the daughters of the Duchess made added to her power in the State. This might have told for more than it did if she, conscious of her strength, had not gone absolutely her own way. The first Ministry of the new reign was largely the creation of the Duke and herself, and yet it represented a compromise. The Tories held the balance of power, for Marlborough, though never a strong party man, had been trained in that way of thinking, and so had Queen Anne. Godolphin, who was at that time a moderate Tory, though he ultimately became a Whig, was Lord Treasurer, a post which won him the lasting resentment of the Queen's uncle, Lord Rochester, who flattered himself—in spite of his harsh treatment of Anne in earlier years—that he was entitled to take the direction of affairs. Nottingham, like Rochester, was a pronounced Tory. Neither of them would have been admitted in the Queen's councils if the Duchess could have had her way; for she, unlike the Duke, was already veering towards the Whigs, and her conversion to that party, in due time, came about,

partly through force of conviction, and partly by the influence of her son-in-law, Lord Sunderland, who was not less extreme in his views than Rochester. The latter would have excluded the Whigs from all offices, small and great. Marlborough and Godolphin, who then and always were of one mind, would not entertain such a proposal, and carried their point in spite of Rochester's expostulations.

The Duchess gives a list of the Tories who thus came to power, and her comment is significant :

" These were men who had all a wonderful zeal for the Church, a sort of public merit that eclipsed all others in the eyes of the Queen. I am firmly persuaded that notwithstanding her extraordinary affection for me, and the entire devotion which her Lord Marlborough and my Lord Godolphin had for many years shown in her service, they would not have had so great a share of her favour and confidence if they had not been reckoned in the number of the Tories."<sup>1</sup>

The Throne is supposed to have no politics; but Queen Anne, perhaps because she was a woman, took sides. She distrusted the Whigs; they had brought her grandfather, Charles I., to the scaffold, she argued, and had been the chief actors in the Revolution, and in the limitations of the power of the Sovereign contained in the Bill of Rights. She looked at them askance because, though the peers who led them were Churchmen, so many of the rank and file of the party were Dissenters, and for people who frequented conventicles and were given to noisy declamations Queen Anne had scant toleration. Her soul was divided between Mrs. Freeman and the Church of England; and if the first was her sworn ally, the latter, she maintained, was the bulwark of her throne.

<sup>1</sup> " Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 125.

The only question on which any difference of opinion arose in those days between Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman was the religious question. Anne was the loyal daughter of the Church, perfervid, resolute in defence of its claims, scrupulously decorous in all the outward observances of the religion to which, to do her simple justice, she had been a sincere adherent from girlhood. The Duchess was inclined to smile at the Queen's scruples. She was in revolt against the authority of the clergy. She thought they were all very well in their way, but to do them reverence was not to her mind. She was, in truth, an emancipated woman, in a sense which is common enough now, but was rare then. Her conduct was irreproachable—no stone can be cast at her in that respect; but her freedom of speech about the cloth was often disconcerting, and sometimes appalling; and the Queen resented it more than the Duchess suspected.

Anne regarded Dissenters as factious people who ought not to be countenanced, and looked with unconcealed repugnance upon the proceedings in Parliament for the relief of their religious disabilities. Mrs. Freeman thought that the word Church was used by people who cared very little about that institution. She declared it seemed to her like a "spell to enchant weak minds." She thought that folks who had the bad taste to frequent conventicles ought not to be placed under the harrow on that account. Mrs. Morley, to her credit, was generous to both Church and State. She founded Queen Anne's Bounty, for the benefit of poor clergy, at a sacrifice of £16,000 a year to her personal revenue, and out of her Civil List she gave, at the beginning of her reign, £100,000 to ease the public burden of the war.

Religion apart, Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman were

not of one mind in regard to politics, though as yet the divergence of view was not pronounced. Party government, though in process of evolution, was not yet clearly established, and the Queen's first Ministry, though the Tories were in ascendancy in it, contained statesmen of Whig proclivities, and this was the more remarkable as party feeling ran high in the country. The Tories were altogether to the mind of Mrs. Morley; the Whigs were more after the heart of Mrs. Freeman than she cared at the moment to admit. The old saying that every man is in philosophy, whether consciously or unconsciously, a disciple of Plato or of Aristotle merely throws into relief a fundamental distinction in human nature. The same idea is apparent in politics. The Tory, broadly speaking, stands for the principle of authority, whilst the Whig represents the principle of liberty. The peril of the one is precedent, hardening into superstition; the snare of the other is revolt, culminating in licence.

Mrs. Morley was all for authority, not untouched with prejudice; Mrs. Freeman would not have been herself if she had not pinned her faith to liberty, only with her the term too often meant audacious self-assertion. The Tories in the reign of Queen Anne stood for the now exploded claims of Divine Right. They held the view that the Sovereign should not merely reign, but govern; and though they had acquiesced in the Revolution of 1688—driven to it by the remorseless logic of James II.'s high-handed folly—they did not relish it. The majority of the Tory party were adherents of the House of Stuart—perfidious Jacobites who looked with alarm at the probability of the accession of the House of Brunswick. They were the Church party, and were all hostile to Dissenters; but some of the high Tories were Roman Catholics, and therefore out of touch

with the majority of their party, who dreaded the claims of Rome.

The Whigs were almost exclusively Protestant in religion, and vigorously upheld the Act of Settlement, which blocked the path of the Pretender as a Catholic Prince. They gloried in the English Revolution, which they had been chiefly instrumental in bringing about, and looked upon the Bill of Rights as the charter which had secured the liberty of the nation. They held that the Sovereign reigned for the good of his subjects; that he derived his authority from them; and that, if he abused it, it was in their power to deprive him of it. Unlike the Tories, the Whigs accepted with complacency, though not with overpassing enthusiasm, the prospect of a change of dynasty at the Queen's death.

Marlborough cannot be described as a party man. His sympathies were with the Tories on most questions of Home Government, especially at the beginning of the reign; they were always with the Church, and for the most with the claims of the Stuarts. But he shared with the Whigs a passion for liberty, and his policy abroad was more in accordance with their views than with the Tories', a process which was hastened, as time went on, by their support of the war. He always, however, tried to steer clear of party entanglements, and was never tired of saying that he stood for the Queen in the affairs of the realm, and for the common cause abroad, or, in other words, the Grand Alliance, which sought to crush the inordinate ambition of Louis XIV.

The Duchess, on the contrary, was a keen partisan. The instinct of revolt was in her blood, so she leaned to the Whigs. She upheld the Queen's authority so long as it did not make too great demands on her own, and, though a Protestant—free-thinking and disillusioned in regard to all ecclesiastical pretensions



—she was neither as attached to the Church nor as prefervid in its defence as her illustrious husband. The Duke possessed the romantic temperament. He had imagination and a warm heart. The Duchess prided herself on her common-sense, took short views, and was, beyond all else, practical. The fixed articles of her creed were belief in herself and pride in the character and achievements of the Duke. As for that great soldier, the Duchess was the lodestar of his life, and his overmastering desire was to live, as he put it, in quiet with her, though not until he had humbled by force of arms what Queen Anne had rightly called the “exorbitant power” of France.

Nothing is more attractive in Marlborough’s character than his invincible patience. Scarcely a petulant sentence has come down to us from his lips, yet few men were ever subjected to so great a strain. The Duchess, in spite of her love for him, was always exacting, and often unreasonable. Her grievances, real or imaginary, were endless, and the Duke, with all the tremendous responsibilities of the war upon him, had to soothe her complaints and to make elaborate protestations of affection, which a more reasonable woman would have taken for granted at such a crisis. It is clear that Marlborough often appealed to Godolphin to induce her to moderate her moods. Sometimes he told the Duchess herself that she would do well to consult that statesman on questions which it was impossible for him to determine amidst shot and shell. The marvel is that Marlborough remained cool, collected, imperturbable, habitually good-tempered and courteous, when his plans wellnigh miscarried through the stupidity of the Dutch Deputies in the camp, and the spleen of the Duchess at the Court.

On both sides of the sea Marlborough was sore let and hindered. He had to contend with jealousy and

interference abroad, and the woman who loved him, and whom in turn he adored with chivalrous devotion, did not spare him when her mood was ruffled by other people. Yet he watched for her letters with the eagerness of a lover, and declared that he would stay a battle if a courier brought one of them, rather than ride into action without tidings from home.

He recognized her great qualities, and not least her unalterable devotion to himself, which never waned nor even faltered. He knew her faults of temperament, he had ample experience of her fits of temper, but he was not blind to the deep underlying tenderness which she seemed to reserve for himself alone. He trusted her implicitly, and left all his private affairs in her hands, not even interfering in the management of their children, except to act the part of a peacemaker; but just because she was so open and impulsive, and so little inclined to weigh her words, he kept her out of all intimate matters relating to the war. His letters from the front tell her in broad outline about his military operations, when they had taken shape, but never disclose his plans. It would be difficult to find a single instance in which he consulted her in such directions, or even asked for her opinion. The reason for such reticence was twofold—the indiscretion of the Duchess, and the fear that his letters in transit might pass, as sometimes happened, into the hands of the enemy.

Godolphin knew more of his mind—far more of it, in fact—than the most trusted officers at his side. Yet even the statesman in whom he placed implicit confidence was often left in the dark—for the clue to the official cipher, though often changed, might at the most critical moment be discovered by one or other of the foreign spies, whom Marlborough feared far more than his open foes. All through the War of the Spanish Succession the Duke kept his own

counsel; and when the officers next in command tried to draw him he dismissed their diplomatic questions with a non-committal smile or a good-natured shrug of the shoulders. In nothing was Marlborough more remarkable than in mastery of himself. All the complicated plans of his campaigns were held rigidly in his own keeping. No man was acquainted with his schemes until he issued his orders, or even knew which way the troops were to march. The secret of far-reaching military movements, which were not concerned with the welfare of England alone, but with that of Europe as well, was in the keeping only of that cool, astute, consummate brain. Yet he never seemed worried, never lost his temper, and was, as has been well said, as calm and nonchalant at the cannon's mouth as at the door of the Queen's drawing-room. The proof of all this will incidentally appear as the story unfolds itself, though it must be borne in mind this is not primarily an account of Marlborough's campaigns, but rather a study of the Duke's character and of that of the great woman who, with all her faults, and in spite of the cheap cynicism that has been levelled at her indiscretions, was worthy to be his wife.

In 1702-03, the period which is now under review, Marlborough's great victories were for the most part unachieved. The battles which established his renown beyond all challenge—Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet—were still unfought. But he had accepted the dukedom in deference to the Queen and the diplomatic reasons for so doing advanced by Heinsius; at the same time he made it plain that he would have preferred to wait for so great an honour until victory had crowned his arms all along the line.

If the Tories were in power in the House of Commons, the Whigs were in a preponderance in the House of Lords. This spelt embarrassment, for the Whig peers

were jealous of Marlborough's preferment; and as they were intent on the Hanoverian succession, they looked at him askance, and feared what direction he might take in the event of Anne's death. But the Whigs as a party were in favour of the war, whilst the Tories at best were half-hearted in the matter. They did not relish hostilities with France, even though they had been driven to acquiesce in them; and the more extreme amongst them, who were called in the jargon of the day the High Fliers, still looked to St. Germain's, and pinned their faith to the young Prince, whom Louis XIV. styled James III.

The most notable men in the House of Commons on the Tory side were Robert Harley—who had the post of Speaker from 1701 to 1705—and Henry St. John. They both afterwards rose to the peerage—Harley as Earl of Oxford, and St. John as Viscount Bolingbroke. Both at the outset of their career were indebted to Marlborough, who was quick to recognize their ability and to advance their prospects. Their characteristics will appear in due course. The one was an astute, scheming man of business, destitute of fine scruples; the other was a versatile and accomplished man of genius, ambitious and unprincipled. They paid great court to the Duchess, and were effusive in their compliments to Marlborough, though in the end, notwithstanding all that he had done for them, they both turned against him, and proved his implacable foes. At this stage of their career they were close friends, but later on they quarrelled, and Bolingbroke had more to do with Harley's dismissal in 1714 than any other statesman.

It is curious to recall how families were divided by political faction in the reign of Anne. It is not necessary to go farther than the Churchills for a case in point. Marlborough was a Tory—with limitations and misgivings; the Duchess was to all intents a

Whig. The Duke himself was eventually drawn to that party. His brother, Admiral Churchill, was an uncompromising and singularly indiscreet Tory; his son-in-law, Lord Sunderland, was an equally indiscreet and uncompromising Whig; whilst Lady Tyrconnel, sister of the Duchess, was a Jacobite open and unabashed, often in residence at the exiled Court, and always in correspondence with it. All this did not ease the Duke's position, especially in the years when he was abroad fighting his battles; for one member of the family or another was continually getting into hot water—a proceeding which was assuredly not to his advantage.

The Duchess meanwhile, installed in unique supremacy at Court, held undivided sway over the Queen. Men called her Viceroy Sarah, and not without reason. She was constantly at Anne's side—more constantly, in truth, than she cared. The Queen never seemed happy if she were out of her sight, whether at Windsor, Kensington, or St. James's, and Anne's powers of talk—she was never a brilliant conversationalist—were soon exhausted. She was content with the latest gossip and interminable games of cards. Sometimes the Queen would relapse into long silence, and when that mood was on her not even ombre or whist had any attractions. Mrs. Morley listened uneasily when Mrs. Freeman extolled the virtues of the Whigs. Mrs. Freeman tried to conceal her apathy by a languid show of interest when Mrs. Morley expressed the fear that the Church was in danger. Even in matters of State, Queen Anne's mind moved slowly; she often betrayed a curious inability to arrive at a decision. She would hesitate and postpone when the business in hand was of a kind to brook no delay. The Duchess, always impetuous and outspoken, sometimes cut further controversy short by exclaiming, "Lord, madame!

it must be so;"<sup>1</sup> and the Queen would abandon her scruples.

Her Court was filled with people of rank in whom she placed little confidence, in spite of their ceremonial bows and expressions of homage. The members of her own household, in confidential asides to Mrs. Freeman, were sometimes the subject of sharp criticism by the Queen. The Duke of Somerset was Master of the Horse, and it was in allusion to something which he had done that had ruffled her that Anne made the following reflection:

"It is very troublesome to have anything to doe with these great men, but one must have patience, which is the only remedy for everything. The unreasonableness, impertinance, and brutality that one sees in all sorts of people every day makes me more sensible of the great blessing God Almighty has given me in three such friends as your dear selfe, Mr. Freeman, and Mr. Montgomery (Lord Godolphin)—a happiness I believe nobody in my sphere ever enjoyed before, and which I will always value as I ought, but never can express the true sense I have of it, though to my last moment I shall make it my endeavour. The Prince and your humble servant desire you would give our service to the Duke of Marlborough."<sup>2</sup>

The Duchess all her life had a passion for maxims and aphorisms, especially if they represented the wisdom of antiquity, and she had the trick of enforcing her arguments by appeals to such writers. Sometimes her reading—it was never either wide or deep—drew a mild rebuke from the Queen:

"I hope when you have some spare minutes to looke on Seneca, you will bestow some of them when writing to your faithful Mrs. Morley though there be no news for a word from my dear Mrs. Freeman and an account of her concerns is more welcome to me than all the world can afford besides."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The Duchess admitted that her temper and notions differed in many respects from those of the Queen. She added that Her Majesty,

"far from being displeased with me from openly speaking my sentiments, sometimes expressed a desire and even added a command that I should continue to do so, promising never to be offended but to love me all the better for my frankness."<sup>1</sup>

Such a protestation was all very well when the wind was in the south, but when it shifted it was forgotten, and a meaning was read into the most chance expressions of the Duchess that was never intended.

Queen Anne, though an indulgent, was a jealous mistress. In the old days, Mrs. Freeman, not yet ennobled, had waited upon her, so to speak, hand and foot, in a manner that could hardly be expected from a Duchess and the wife of the greatest man in the realm. Mrs. Freeman wanted a little more liberty. Her horizon was not bounded by the four walls of the Queen's closet, and she had many friends of whom Anne knew nothing, and some were not of a rank to make them welcome at Court. She loved to go abroad on her own account, and not always in attendance. Her daughters made claims upon her, and her house and gardens at St. Albans had attractions to a woman who, with all her social gifts, liked occasionally to follow her own tastes in retirement. But Mrs. Morley proved exacting, and had not sufficient imagination to realize such demands or aspirations. If Mrs. Freeman took the air, and made a call which detained her till the curtains were drawn and the wax candles lighted, Mrs. Morley felt hurt.

Prince George was heavy company. He was a sort of suppressed personage of exalted rank, and he must often have wished himself back at Copenhagen. His ambitions had been foiled in his wife's reign, as well

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

as in that of his father-in-law, and his health was depressed. He was a gourmet, with a fondness for high play as well as dainty dishes, and he lost heavily at cards. Mrs. Freeman always declared that the Prince treated both the Duke and herself with consideration, but she could not forbear smiling at his odd habits: "The Prince used to employ himself agreeably all day either in standing upon a stairhead or looking out of a window, making malicious remarks on the passers-by." Anne, she adds, used to "grow uneasy at the figure His Highness cut in that princely amusement."<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Morley, even when taciturn and moody, disliked solitude, and, what is more, was partial to the company of no one except Mrs. Freeman. That way came the possibility of misunderstanding—Mrs. Freeman's desire to go her own way occasionally, and Mrs. Morley's desire to have her always at her side. It gave an opportunity which a third person took advantage of—Abigail Hill, a sly and demure Woman-in-Waiting, whom Mrs. Freeman deemed of no account, but whom she had introduced into the Queen's household, and of whom she afterwards said: "I took her from a broom."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



## CHAPTER IX

### MISTRESS ABIGAIL HILL

ABIGAIL HILL, whom the Duchess of Marlborough "took from a broom," would never have been heard of but for such good fortune. Her childhood was spent in obscurity and poverty. She was the daughter of a London merchant who had made shipwreck of his affairs. He was powerless to provide for his children, who were growing up neglected in a home that was not merely shadowed, but imperilled by financial reverses. Abigail Hill and her sister Mary, penniless girls of narrow understanding and slight education, possessed neither beauty nor wit—nor, indeed, anything else which was likely to shield them from sinking into the dull ranks of hopeless penury.

The whole family was in desperate straits when Lady Marlborough, in the reign of William, heard of their miserable plight. Up to that time she had not been aware of the existence of the Hills, much less that they could urge the claim of relationship. One day she was told that she had an aunt in the city who had married an Anabaptist named Francis Hill, a merchant, unsuccessful in business, who had become bankrupt. The Hills were old, they were in actual want, their sons were in rags, and their daughters had no prospects beyond domestic service. Her sympathies were quickly awakened; she sent for Mrs. Hill and gave her money. Shortly afterwards the friendless children were thrown on the world by the death of both parents.

Lady Marlborough was determined to give them a start in life. Whatever faults may be laid to her charge, it can never be said that she was callous in the presence of distress. Quick sympathy marked all stages of her career in such matters, whether her method of dispensing her bounty was considerate or autocratic. As soon as she heard, therefore, of the forlorn position of her young cousins, being a practical woman, she was not content with a mere dole, but took steps to put them in the way of earning an honest livelihood. The eldest boy was old enough to be placed out at once, so she persuaded Lord Godolphin to give him a small appointment in the Customs; and when financial security for the lad's conduct was required, she arranged the matter. The other brother, Jack Hill, was a little fellow whom she clothed and sent to school at St. Albans. When he grew old enough, she found him a place as page in the household of Prince George, which gave her the opportunity of watching his conduct. Her kindness to the youth did not end there; for when Lord Marlborough became Governor of the young Duke of Gloucester, she never rested until she persuaded her husband to appoint Jack Hill to the post of Groom of the Bedchamber. He afterwards entered the army. Here it is possible to cite her own words:

"Though my Lord Marlborough always said that Jack Hill was good for nothing, yet to oblige me he made him his aide-de-camp and afterwards gave him a regiment."<sup>1</sup>

Gratitude is the most short-lived of all the virtues, and the Duchess, chilled in old age by its absence, may be left to end the story:

"When Mr. Harley thought it useful to attack the Duke of Marlborough in Parliament (in 1712), this

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 180.

honest Jack Hill, this once ragged boy whom I clothed, happened to be sick in bed, but was nevertheless persuaded by his sister (Mrs. Masham) to get up . . . and go to the House and vote against the Duke."<sup>1</sup>

The girls of the family were even more helpless than their brothers, but Lady Marlborough proved equal to a fourfold appeal for compassion. A place was found for Mary Hill in the Duke of Gloucester's household, and when the young Prince died she retired with an adequate pension. The other sister, Abigail, a frightened-looking, dejected girl, dull, taciturn, and of a foreboding temper, she took from sheer pity under her own roof at St. Albans. At length, in 1704, when her fortunes were at their height and her ascendancy at Court unbounded, she prevailed on Queen Anne to accept the services of her young kinswoman as one of the Women of the Bedchamber. It was thus directly through the influence of the Duchess, when Mistress of the Robes, that Abigail Hill, though in a subordinate capacity, entered the Household.

At first all went well. Abigail was apparently passionately devoted to the Duchess. She was meek, demure, deferential almost to the point of servility—the sort of person whose whole bearing suggests an unspoken apology for existence. But no change of fortune could dispel her melancholy. She was hopelessly depressed, and seemed quite out of place at Court. She was, in truth, the kind of woman whose presence in a drawing-room might have occasioned lifted eyebrows if good breeding did not preclude any sign of surprise. Stress has been laid on her antecedents because they show conclusively that she would never have emerged from obscurity if she had not been the kinswoman of the Duchess of Marl-

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 181.

borough. At no other Court in the world would such a woman have had the least chance of grasping power and place except at the Court of St. James's, and then only whilst Anne was Queen.

The Duchess of Marlborough was haughty, imperious, and of a jealous temperament; she kept other ladies of rank on a more or less distant footing with the Queen. This was all very well so long as her own influence was paramount, but when it began to decline—Anne was human, curiously dependent and lonely—it paved the way for Abigail Hill, who was always within call. She was apparently the soul of discretion, and gradually won the Queen's confidence. Meanwhile the Duchess, who seldom did anything by halves, never dreaming that such a creature could be other than she seemed, took pity on her solitude at Court, and extended attentions to her which softened her lot and drew from her renewed protestations of gratitude. The Duchess even took her cousin abroad when she went to entertainments. Abigail was so docile, so helpless, such a model of all the submissive virtues, that the Duchess was completely off her guard, and treated her with the indulgence which a strong, self-reliant nature so often displays to the weak. It is significant that the first warning she received about Abigail Hill came from no less a person than the Queen. It was the fashion in those days, especially when great ladies dipped their quills in ink, merely to place the day of the week at the head of them—Tuesday, Thursday, or Sunday, as the case might be. They were careless about the day of the month, much less the particular year in which they wrote. Queen Anne and the Duchess, in the ordinary freedom of brisk correspondence, were not exceptions to this rule, though both of them on occasion could be punctilious in such directions.

Soon after Abigail Hill's introduction to Court, the

Queen, having observed the attentions which the Duchess was bestowing upon her, took the opportunity to write in the following strain when her favourite lady was just returning from a flying visit to her children at St. Albans:

"Dear Mrs. Freeman hates writing so much I fear, though she should stay away two or three days, she would hardly let me hear from her, and therefore for my own sake I must write to get a line or two. I fancy now you are in town you will be tempted to see the Opera, which I should not wonder at, for I should be so too, if I were able to stir, but when that will be God knows, for my *feavor* is not quite gone, and I am still so lame I cannot go without limping. I hope Mrs. Freeman has no thoughts of going to the Opera with Mrs. Hill, and will have a care of engaging herself too much in her company, for if you give way to that it is a thing that will insensibly grow upon you. Therefore give me leave once more to beg for your own sake, as well as poor Mrs. Morley's, that you would have as little to do with that enchantress as 'tis possible, and pray pardon me for saying this."<sup>1</sup>

There is a touch of jealousy in the letter. Mrs. Morley was beginning to be a martyr to gout, and what she resented was, not that Mrs. Freeman should show herself at the play, but that she go there in the company of so obscure a person as Abigail Hill. Possibly Mrs. Morley thought that the "shuffling little wretch," as other people were beginning to call this particular Woman-in-Waiting, was not merely being lifted out of her place in the palace and in the public eye, but also was coming between herself and Mrs. Freeman. The term "enchantress" is significant. It shows that the Queen recognized in the smooth-tongued, demure woman, who dropped her eyes and ran to open doors, certain wheedling propensities which made confidences dangerous. The Duchess, on the contrary, always open as the day—too often a cloudy

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

and stormy day, perhaps—smiled at such fears. Abigail Hill was never an enchantress to her. She did not dream that a woman whom she had befriended from childhood was other than the soul of devotion that she professed to be. It seemed absurd to take her seriously, in view of her humble antecedents, her dependent position, her mean capacity, though it pleased her to treat her with kindness. No harm could possibly come of giving a poor waiting-woman a little pleasure, and so Mrs. Morley's warning was impulsively dismissed as quite needless.

Both Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman were just then in the dark as to Abigail Hill's real character, though the former showed herself more shrewd in its interpretation; and this was probably due to Prince George, who more than shared Mrs. Morley's surprise that Mrs. Freeman should make so much of the poor creature. What is clear at the moment—for to pursue the story farther at this stage would be to ignore other factors in the problem—is that Mrs. Morley, soon after the introduction of Abigail Hill to her presence, came to the conclusion that Mrs. Freeman was ill-advised to make so much of her kinswoman, and so wrote her well-intentioned warning against the "enchantress" to whose wiles she herself afterwards succumbed. It is also not less clear that Mrs. Freeman treated the matter with amused disdain, and had not the least suspicion that there was some reason why she should not in her own careless, impulsive fashion continue to treat her cousin with a certain degree of familiarity. But whilst Abigail Hill was still in this subordinate position, and as much at the beck and call of Mrs. Freeman as Mrs. Morley, other influences were coming into play.

The first hint of the cloud of misunderstanding which too soon darkened the skies occurs in a letter from the Duke. It was written from abroad imme-

diately before his journey to Vienna, and bears date the 22nd of September, 1705. The Duchess apparently had written to him in querulous mood. She had dropped a hint that Abigail Hill was not quite what she had supposed. He dismisses the matter briefly, and counsels patience:

"You must think as little as you can of it, for a Court can never be without envy or malice, and everybody in this world must have troubles, but you and I ought not to repine."<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess seems to have followed his advice, as well she might, for at this time she had nothing to ruffle her. The alienation which ultimately took place between the Queen and the Duchess was already in process before Abigail Hill was anything more than an insignificant Woman-in-Waiting. She would have been powerless if political controversy had not risen between them. Even then she would not have gained the Queen's ear, if the Duchess, nettled at what she regarded as Anne's obstinacy, had not absented herself for long periods from the Court. Lady Sunderland warned her mother that in doing so she was making a mistake, and that the town drew its own conclusions. The Duke always held that the Queen was at the mercy of her immediate surroundings, and Lord Godolphin was of the same opinion. But the Duchess threw such considerations to the wind, and, when she had what she called "the spleen," insisted on taking her own way in defiance of prudence.

Between the years 1705 and 1707 sharp differences of opinion sprang up between the Queen and the Duchess, which had nothing whatever to do with Abigail, whom both regarded at this time as a mere puppet. The rock of offence was Religion. The stone of stumbling was Politics. They were drifting,

from lack of sympathy, into misunderstanding; but they would never have come to the point of an open quarrel if Mrs. Morley had possessed humour or Mrs. Freeman discretion. Queen Anne, on the Duchess's own showing, was neither a fool nor a hypocrite. Her mind moved slowly, and was not alert, and she had an instinctive distrust of new ideas. Her interest in the great literary movement of her reign was languid; nor did art make much appeal to her. But the Duchess admits that the Queen was "religious without any affectation, and certainly meant to do everything that was just." She was a stickler for etiquette, laid great stress on ceremonies, and, like all people of narrow mental outlook, attached too much importance to trifles. She did not live in the realm of ideas, but took short views, and was at the mercy of whatever facts possessed her mind at the moment. Tenacious of her own opinions, she was apt to grow sullen and obstinate when they were controverted, and took refuge in silence when confronted by logic which she was powerless to refute. She was a good wife and mother, frugal but not parsimonious in private expenditure; generous, and even lavish, in public benefactions and rewards. She gave her subjects an example of dignified simplicity in high places, and, though naturally of an indolent temperament, cannot be accused of any dereliction in public duty. Her chief weakness was fondness for the pleasures of the table, both in meat and drink—indulgences which brought on the malady which shortened her days.

The Queen's outlook on life was controlled by two fixed ideas, as already indicated. One was that the Tories were the bulwark of the Crown; the other, that the Church of England was not merely the only security for religion and morality, but for law and order in the realm. The Tories maintained the Divine right of Kings, and Queen Anne was a Stuart. It is true that



they had accepted the Revolution of 1688, but they were not reconciled to it; and when James II. by his own folly went into exile, they still boasted their loyalty to the "King over the water." The reign of William III. strained their allegiance to the Revolution Settlement, and it was with relief that they welcomed the accession of Anne as a daughter of the House of Stuart. That was the attitude taken up by the majority of the Tories in the new reign, but a powerful minority, styled zealous Jacobites, and perfervid Roman Catholics, were secretly plotting for the Queen's half-brother, whom they already styled James III. This movement, which ran like a stream underground as long as Anne lived, broke forth after her death, in the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745. Meanwhile the Tories, broadly speaking, put the authority of the Crown before everything else; whilst the Whigs laid stress on the privileges of Parliament secured at the Revolution. They believed that the Crown is above all parties.

High Tories, like Rochester and Nottingham, were confirmed in office when Anne came to the throne; but when they could not work amicably with moderate Tories like Godolphin and Marlborough, their places were filled by Harley and St. John, both of whom owed their preferment to the Duke, who saw their merit and trusted their discretion. Constitutional theories as to the authority of the Crown apart, the Tories appealed to the Queen because they were the Church party. They stood for its defence against Romanists on the one hand, and Nonconformists on the other. They repudiated the authority of the Vatican. They resented the pretensions of Geneva. They were prepared to defend at all hazards the Protestant cause, which in the country had its centre in Canterbury, and in the capital at Lambeth. The Queen was sincerely attached to the rites and doc-

trines of the Established Church, in which she had been brought up. She delighted in the society of courtly Bishops and Deans, and Dr. Sharp, Archbishop of York, a high-principled prelate, was in reality, though not of course in name, keeper of Her Majesty's conscience. Anne called Dr. Sharp her "father confessor."

The Duchess, like Marlborough, began life, as has already been shown, with Tory proclivities, though she professed little interest in party cries. Great matters of State were, in her early married life, she declared, a matter of indifference to her. But her attitude changed in the reign of William, and as long as it lasted, partly because of her mortal antipathy to the King, she was a Tory, though with misgivings. The marriage of her daughter, Lady Anne, to Charles Spencer in 1700—a match which was brought about by Lord Godolphin, and to which the Duke at first was strongly opposed—drew her into association with the Whigs. The Duke's scruples in regard to the marriage were only banished when the Earl of Sunderland assured him that his son would be "governed in everything public and private by him."

Charles Spencer had sat for five years in the House of Commons, where he was recognized as one of the most pronounced and ambitious of the Whigs. He made a parade of Republicanism, declared that he would refuse the title of Lord, and hoped to see the day when there would not be a peer in England. But in the year in which he married Lady Anne he dropped these ridiculous assertions, and before twelve months were out succeeded his father as third Earl of Sunderland. One of his first acts as a peer was to vote against the annuity to Prince George of Denmark—a step which greatly incensed the Duchess. But he had a wheedling manner and lively wit, audacity of

speech, and a handsome face, and quite early in the new reign the Mistress of the Robes took him back into favour. Lord Sunderland's gay banter, contempt for authority, and unconventional manners, attracted the Duchess, and gradually she was drawn to the Whigs, partly by her own temperament, but not a little by her lively son-in-law's oracular deliverances. That way came a sharp division of opinion between the Sovereign and herself. The Queen thought Sunderland feather-brained and dangerous, and did not forget that he had cast his vote against Prince George. There were wrangles in the royal closet, in consequence, over the Occasional Conformity Bill, a harsh enactment against Dissenters, which the Tories supported and the Whigs as stoutly opposed. There were wrangles, also, concerning the cry which was rising in the country, "The Church is in danger"—a subject which moved the Queen's fears, though the Duchess openly derided it. The latter declared that Her Majesty was ignorant of everything but what the parsons had taught her; and since Her Grace had a knack—to borrow her own words—of "tumbling out all that was in her mind," the poor Queen, who could not argue, but could be obdurate, was in an evil case.

If the Duchess cared little for politics in early life, she cared next to nothing for religion, except as a sort of vigilant society for keeping the lower classes in order. She had fashioned a rough creed of her own, not very deep, assuredly not soaring, but one which satisfied her and to which she was loyal. She was a hard woman of the world, who thought for herself and was contemptuous of authority. She would have defended with her last breath the claims of Seneca against those of the most saintly Christian apologist. She believed in morality, she held fast by duty, and, for the rest, she had no patience with enthu-

siasm, and was not enamoured of self-sacrifice. Pride ruled her will; and if her virtues were heroic, they could scarcely be called Christian. She, in common with Anne, was not averse to the society of the clergy, but only on terms of perfect equality. The Queen took her spiritual directions, and was done with doubt; it was a case of unconditional surrender. The Duchess, on the contrary, drew only to the company of men like Bishop Burnet, Dr. Benjamin Hoadley, and Dr. Samuel Clarke, who were not righteous overmuch, and were assuredly not inclined to gird at a fair rationalist in high places. These three accomplished scholars stood themselves on the verge of heresy, and therefore were not disconcerted by the most startling harangues on religion. But it was otherwise with the Queen, who felt, when the Duchess, in her more unguarded moods, rattled on such high themes, as if the ground were slipping from underneath her feet.

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## CHAPTER X

### MARLBOROUGH'S CROWDED YEARS

IN the early years of the reign, when the ascendancy of the Duchess at Court was unbounded and no cloud had as yet arisen between Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman, the Duke of Marlborough, in supreme command abroad, was covering himself with glory in battles which rank with the greatest military achievements of the world.

Whatever view may be held of Marlborough as a statesman, no conflict of opinion is possible concerning his claims as a soldier. His consummate handling of men in the protracted and arduous War of the Spanish Succession is the best commentary on his military genius. The obstacles which confronted him, not at one stage of the war, but from first to last, were enough to daunt any but a born leader of men. Marlborough had to reckon with the jealousy and strife of faction in England, the sullenness and stupidity of foreign Princes in the field, and the mischievous and ignorant interference of the Dutch Deputies, who, to his annoyance, accompanied him to the theatre of war. He had also to measure swords with the most illustrious Marshals of France, who stood at the head of troops which, in all the wars of Louis XIV., had never been defeated. The majority of the English soldiers under his command were raw and ill-disciplined. His army had been recruited almost at haphazard; it contained numbers of men who had been released from gaol on condition that

they enlisted. It is true that the soldiers whom the Allies of England provided were less open to suspicion on the score of character; but they were more sluggish, and, at the outset, not alert at the word of command. Yet out of such unpromising material Marlborough, by his patience, his tact, his consideration, and the magic of his personality, created an army which, so long as he was in command, was invincible.

When the war began, half the parishes in England were relieved of the presence of men guilty of crime or hovering on the verge of it; when it ended, wise discipline had turned the veterans who came back into manly and law-abiding citizens. Many victories stand to the credit of Marlborough, but perhaps none of them was more remarkable than the transformation of his lawless troops into brave soldiers and heroes of the rank and file. His secret lay in his implicit confidence in his men—a confidence which was rewarded in the strain of battle by a devotion which never faltered. It is easy to seize on the weak aspects of a great reputation. Historians and moralists have often laid stress on the foibles of Marlborough; but it stands to his credit that he never needlessly threw the life of a single trooper away, and no soldier worthy to carry a sword has ever felt other than shame in the presence of his detractors. His military genius, by common consent, has given him the foremost place in the splendid succession of men in supreme command who have upheld the lofty traditions of the British army and done battle in defence of the Crown. Prince Eugene in his own days, the Duke of Wellington a century later, and Lord Roberts in our own time, are representatives of this consensus of competent opinion. It was the last-named who said that Marlborough's superb military genius was linked to an almost unparalleled evenness of temper, and a regard for his troops which earned for him a devotion

scarcely less than that which the Tenth Legion felt for Cæsar or the Old Guard for Napoleon.<sup>1</sup>

Again and again Marlborough was confronted by circumstances so untoward that victory seemed well-nigh impossible. Yet he never besieged a city which he did not capture, or forced a battle in which he was not victorious. It is easy to say that genius, when it rises to such heights, breaks all barriers down and is irresistible. But even Marlborough could not have snatched success in some of his perilous hazards if he had not been able to summon at will the finest qualities of his men, and to infuse them with his own chivalry. The most critical schemes in war will miscarry if loyalty to the leader is not unflinching, or if the word of command, though it may lead to certain death, is not implicitly obeyed. This was in part the secret of Marlborough's power—the absolute trust which he inspired through all ranks of the army.

In the years 1703-07, when the authority of the Duchess was still unchallenged at the Court of Queen Anne, Marlborough was constantly abroad fighting against the arms of France. Two great victories fell to him within that period, and both of them rank among the decisive battles of the world. Their names are inscribed in the annals of famous regiments, proud to carry aloft to-day the banners which bear the magic words "Blenheim" and "Ramillies."

It is aside from the purpose of these pages to recount the story with minuteness—thrilling and dramatic though it be—of Marlborough's campaigns. This book is primarily concerned, not with the warfare he accomplished, but with the woman he worshipped; and yet, in broad outline, it is impossible to ignore his achievements on the arduous march and in the tumult of battle, since she was ever in his thought,

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to "From Cromwell to Wellington—Twelve Soldiers." Essays edited by Professor H. Spenser Wilkinson.

and the letters which he sent her would be unintelligible without at least some account of the stir and strain under which they were written. It is therefore scarcely necessary to trace the complicated and far-reaching operations of the War of the Spanish Succession in the years under review, since it is with Marlborough in the personal sense that this chapter is concerned. The successes which marked the opening campaign of 1702 have been already described, and there is no need to linger over that which followed in 1703, since the bold plans which Marlborough had formed for the conduct of the war for the most part miscarried during his second campaign, owing to the inefficiency, and at times insubordination, of the Dutch generals, and the meddlesome interference of the Field Deputies, who were still allowed to accompany him to the front. Athlone and Saarbruck, both of whom, though testy and opinionated, were capable soldiers, had by this time died; and the command of the Dutch had passed to Overkirk, Slangenberg, and Opdam—officers bound by old traditions, and destitute of the skill either to cope with the sudden emergencies of war, or to forecast the movements in the field of the foremost Marshals of France, whom Louis in alarm had placed in command.

If Marlborough had been properly supported by the Allies in the campaign of 1703, he could have brought the war even then within sight of the end. On two occasions in 1703 the French seemed to have delivered themselves into his hands, but through the hesitation or blunders of the Dutch his projects miscarried at the critical moment. The siege of isolated fortresses or towns was not at all to his mind; he was eager to deliver a crushing blow in a pitched battle. But the Dutch commanders did not like to risk a pitched battle, and even when Marlborough threw his army with incredible celerity across Boufflers' line of



retreat to the Demer, and a great victory was morally certain, the Field Deputies interposed, and declined to allow him to give battle.

His letters to the Duchess, written in hot haste during the progress of the campaign of 1703, reveal his swiftly changing moods. His troubles are made plain by a letter from The Hague. He writes (January 21):

"All things in Germany go as wrong as possible, and the people here grow every day more and more in want of money, for which almost everything that should be done stands still, and the consequence of which must be fatal if we should not have good success this campaign."<sup>1</sup>

A few days later (February 1) he writes again, declaring that the disputes in the English Parliament "have a very ill effect here." Matters in Germany were at the moment at a standstill.

"My only hope is that we have a just cause, and that God Almighty will enable us some way or other to secure the liberties of Europe."<sup>2</sup>

Three days later he speaks of having "no quiet," and declares that he is "extremely out of heart" at what he calls the ill prospect of the war:

"In all the other campaigns, I had an opinion of being able to do something for the good of the common cause, but in this I have no other hopes but that some lucky accident may enable me to do good."<sup>3</sup>

In a letter from Cologne on the 10th of April he writes:

"I have had the spleen very much since I came to this place, but I hope I shall be easier when we have everything ready for the attack on Bonn. There is nothing I would not venture to be one hour with you I fancy that would cure me of all my uneasiness, for

<sup>1</sup> *Blenheim Papers.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

believe me, my dear soul, nothing makes me bear being in the world but my gratitude to the Queen, and the hope of having it in my power, in a little time, to live happily with you."<sup>1</sup>

Ten days later he writes again from the camp before Bonn:

"If you had not positively desired that I should always burn your letters, I should have been very glad to have kept your letter of the ninth; it was so very kind, and particularly on the subject of our living quietly together, till which happy times comes I am sure I cannot be contented. I wish I could recall twenty years past, (and) I do assure you for no other reason that I might have longer time and be the better able to convince you how truly sensible I am at this time of your kindness, which is the only real comfort of my life."

Then the sense of duty asserts itself, and so he adds:

"I ought in the first place as long as I am in the world to consider the Queen's service, and next not to give occasion to my enemies to find fault."<sup>2</sup>

In a letter written three days later, he makes it plain that the artillery which had delayed the siege had at last arrived. He tells the Duchess that he thinks that in three weeks he will be the master of Bonn. He describes his quarters, which were on the summit of a wooded hill overlooking the town, and he adds that, as he rests on his bed in his tent, he listens in the darkness to the nightingales, and, remembering that the Duchess loves the thrilling song of those birds, wishes that he could send them to her. The spleen apart, it is clear that the Duke, harassed with anxiety, was far from well. He complains of the gout and "excessive headaches."

When Bonn capitulated, on the 15th of May, the Duke did not let the grass grow under his feet. He

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

marched at once to join the army on the Meuse, for he still hoped to induce the Dutch to advance on Antwerp. He speaks of being in the saddle from midnight till four o'clock the next afternoon, and, after a short rest, marching again the same day. His next letter was from the camp of Thys, the 20th of May, and it is so quaint that it must be given as it stands:

"The only thing I bought from Bon was a bord that whistled very finely—it was the Elector's bord and I intended it for Mis Mary. My Lord Albemarle coming into my tent after I was a bed last night, his dog killed it, soe that I have nothing now but to lett Lady Mary know my good intentions, and that my Lord Albemarle says that he will give mee another bord for it, which she shal have. Our march yesterday brought me soe near to the ffrench, that if it had not been for a little brooke it wou'd have been a very uneasy day."<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess had told him that the Queen was in a despondent mood. He says, in reply, that if Her Majesty has a return of the vapours he would suggest that the Court should go to Bath. He envies the Duchess when she tells him that she has no news, and no concern but that of furnishing Windsor Lodge. He was receiving disconcerting tidings at the time, and the whole burden of the war was on his shoulders. She had reported that there was political unrest in England. The Duke's comment was that there is nothing more certain than that both Whigs and Tories would be tyrants if they were let alone. In a letter from the camp at Thys, which bears date the 27th of May, the Duke says:

"I think you are very happy in having Lady Mary with you. I should esteem myself so if she could sometimes be an hour with me. The greatest ease I now have is sometimes sitting for an hour in my

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

chair alone and thinking of the happiness I may yet have of living quietly with you, which, upon my soul, is the greatest that I propose to myself in this world. I find by my Lord Treasurer's last letter that if we should succeed here in some things which we take to be very great (the design on Antwerp) it would not be thought so in England. As for myself, I am not much concerned, having no ambition but that of living with you, and whilst I am in the world endeavouring to lessen the power of France, which is the best return I can make to the Queen for all her goodness. If I am satisfied that the methods taken here are the best to attain that end, I shall not much value popularity."<sup>1</sup>

A few days later, when the army halted again, on the 7th of June, he asks the Duchess to send him a portrait of the Queen by Sir Godfrey Kneller:

"It is for the Princess Sophia, I mean the Electress of Hanover, who has desired my Lord Raby to let me know that she would take it very kindly if I would send her a picture of the Queen."<sup>2</sup>

He had just sent the Duchess some fine horses for her carriage, but had forgotten to tell her that they had not been shod. He wants her to attend to this as soon as they arrive, or else the hard English roads will spoil their feet:

"They are reckoned the best sort of horses for service, so if they are well used they will last a long while, and I believe you will think them very handsome."<sup>3</sup>

He tells the Duchess, in two letters written from the camp at Vorselaure early in July, that, whilst he would naturally like to possess the esteem of his countrymen, he will not feel much concerned if they accuse him unjustly. He states that he is determined to do nothing but what he thinks is for the good of the army. England, he declares, has so many unreasonable people that he wants to stand aloof from

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

political faction. He is not inclined to be mixed up with the politics of either party, and adds that he will be in no way surprised if, in consequence of such an attitude, he finds himself ill used. He cannot comment on much that the Duchess had told him, because he has not the cipher, and "all the truths are not to be spoken." He warns her to be guarded in her letters, since if they fell into other hands they would "create you a great many enemies."<sup>1</sup>

Nottingham, though Secretary of State, was opposed to the war. He stood high in the favour of the Queen, and did his best to undermine the authority of Godolphin, whom he hoped to supplant. It seemed in the summer of 1703 that the Ministry might at any moment fall to pieces, and Godolphin, harassed by intrigues in his own Cabinet, did not spare the Duke, who had difficulties enough in the field, the story of his political misfortunes. All the associations of Marlborough had hitherto been with the Tories, but when Nottingham, Rochester, and Mr. Secretary Hedges, seemed bent on the overthrow of the Coalition Government under Godolphin, he grew impatient, especially when he heard that a cry was rising in the land that he was prolonging the war for his own advantage. The Whigs, moreover, were beginning to pay him court, knowing full well that the Duchess was rapidly becoming one of their most zealous partisans; and when his loyalty to Godolphin led him to meet their advances coldly, he found himself the target for both parties. The Whigs, though in favour of the war, demanded more authority in the Cabinet as the price of their support of Marlborough's spirited foreign policy, and Godolphin, wellnigh driven to bay repeatedly, told the Duke that he was coming to the conclusion that he must resign, since he could not obtain the support of either

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

party. Marlborough felt like a man in danger of falling between two stools. His attitude of detachment exasperated the Whigs, whilst the Tories assailed his conduct of the war.

The Duchess at this crisis rendered Marlborough's position more difficult by bombarding the Queen with complaints about the Tories, and scarcely more judicious eulogiums of their political opponents. She even read extracts from her husband's letters to Queen Anne, and made them the text for angry comments of her own. In one of these letters, Marlborough—wearied with wrangles with the Dutch, who checkmated his military plans and with political intrigues at the Court of St. James's, which he was powerless to control—had expressed the wish to throw up his command. He meant the letter for the Duchess alone, but she promptly read the crucial sentence in it to the Queen, and dropped at the same time the hint that Lord Godolphin and herself were much of the same mind.

The Queen was startled, and, as soon as she had had time to grasp the significance of such an intimation, wrote to the Duchess:

“ The thought that both my dear Mrs. Freeman and Mr. Freeman seem to have of retiring give me no small uneasiness, and therefore I must say something on that subject. It is no wonder at all that people in your posts should be weary of the world who are so continually troubled with all the hurry and impertinence of it. But give me leave to say you should a little consider your faithful friends and poor country, which must be ruined if ever you put your melancholy thoughts in execution. As for your poor unfortunate faithful Morley, she could not bear it; for if ever you should forsake me, I would have nothing more to do with the world but make another abdication. What is a crown when the support of it is gone? I will never forsake your dear self, Mr. Freeman, or Mr. Montgomery (Lord Godolphin), but

will always be your constant and faithful friend. We four must never part till death mows us down with his impartial hand."<sup>1</sup>

Marlborough, always chivalrous, was touched by the Queen's goodness, and declared that, after such an assurance, he was prepared to meet the vexations of public life so long as Her Majesty deemed his services of any avail. Unfortunately, the Duchess, less generous in temperament, interpreted the warm-hearted letter in a different way. She was quick to see that the Queen was annoyed with Nottingham and those who sided with him, and seems to have jumped to the conclusion that Anne, with a little more pressure, would come over to her own opinion about the Whigs. She therefore renewed, in season and out, her attacks on the Tories, only, however, to be met with the chilling response that the Whigs were not to Her Majesty's mind, since they held political theories which were as dangerous to the Crown as to the Church. The Queen might dislike Nottingham and the demands of the more violent Tories, but she was not prepared on that account to relinquish her conviction that the more moderate men of his party were the bulwark of the Throne.

The Duchess was persuaded at this time that the Tories were actively plotting against the Queen, and she railed against them in her letters to the Duke. He told her that he could not by any means "allow that they were against the Queen," and added that, in his opinion, Her Majesty might make use of men of all parties "to the true interest of England." He said that that meant the Protestant Succession, for which he was prepared to venture his "last drop of blood." He deplored that the Duchess and himself should differ so much in opinion, but added that he was firmly resolved "never to assist any Jacobite

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 132.

whatsoever, nor any Tory who was in favour of persecution." He assured the Duchess that he would do anything in the world to make her mind easy that did not mean, in his judgment, ruin to the Queen. Marlborough was clearly depressed in the autumn of 1703. He did not think he was adequately supported, in the conduct of the war, by public opinion in England. The attempt of the Duchess to drive him into the camp of the Whigs was not to his mind, even though he was forced to admit that they, far more than the Tories, were in favour of a spirited foreign policy. He was stung, moreover, by the cheap sneers with which he was assailed, in what he called "barbarous lampoons," which his enemies duly placed under his eye. Beyond all else, he was chagrined by the failure of his attempts to strike a decisive blow against France, and the knowledge that he would have done so on two, if not three, separate occasions that year, and had only been prevented by the folly of the Dutch, reduced him for the moment almost to despair. He saw quite clearly that the campaign had ended rather to the advantage of the French than to the Allies, and he knew that Louis XIV. was resolved on a bold stroke, which, if successful, would carry the French army to the gates of Vienna, and bring Europe to his feet.

It was clear that the Duke was so disheartened that he had serious thoughts of throwing up his command. He said proudly, "All political parties are alike," and added that his ambition was to do only what was for the interest of the Queen and England. As for the rest, he was not in the humour to covet the position of a favourite of either Whigs or Tories. He had come to the conclusion that the war would either drag on or end disastrously if it were not instantly pursued with spirit. He knew enough of what was passing at Versailles to be aware that France meant



in the next campaign to confront the Allies with its most renowned Marshals at the head of reinforced armies. He did not dread the struggle, but saw that, if he was to be victorious, both political parties in England must cease from wrangling, and give him their undivided support—at all events, as long as the crisis lasted. He could not but see that the Duchess paraded her hostility to the Tories at a most inopportune moment, and it was this more than anything else, perhaps, that made the strong man armed give utterance so often to a passionate longing for peace. But he saw, also, that France must triumph, and the affairs, not of England and Holland alone, but of Europe, must be thrown into hopeless confusion, if at this juncture divided counsels prevailed either in the Cabinet or in the field.

On his return to England the Duke therefore insisted upon the formation of a Ministry upon which he could count for support. He had come to the parting of the ways. He was willing to put his sword in the scabbard if England were not at his back. He was willing to use it to some purpose if the nation rallied to his side. Happily for Marlborough's renown and the glory of England, the Queen rose to the occasion, and the situation was saved. Nottingham and other violent Tories were dismissed from the Ministry; Robert Harley, who at that time posed as the Duke's friend, and Henry St. John—afterward Lord Bolingbroke—a young statesman whose fortunes Marlborough had always sought to promote, became respectively Secretary of State and Secretary of War. Godolphin, the one man whom the Duke absolutely trusted, retained his position as Lord Treasurer. These appointments, though they strengthened the Duke's hands, were not approved of by either his son-in-law, Lord Sunderland, or the Duchess. The former took the view that the Whigs had been slighted by the admission of Harley and St. John to the

Cabinet, and the Duchess, who at the time was very much under the influence of Lord Sunderland, railed against them. She disliked Harley because of his smooth tongue and air of mystery; she distrusted St. John, and detected, under his debonair manners and great show of candour, scheming and boundless ambition.

It would have been well for the Duke if he had listened to her request not to place implicit confidence in either of them. He thought the Duchess, however, quite mistaken when she protested that they were doubtful friends, if not dangerous enemies. He knew that they were both men of ability eager to shine in the service of the State, and, since—unlike the Duchess—suspicion of others was not his weakness, did his best to laugh away her fears. He could think of nothing but the conduct of the war, and, knowing that both Harley and St. John were on the side of its bold renewal, he was content with their assurances of fidelity; yet subsequent events were to prove that the Duchess had taken the true measure of both men.

The Duke spent the winter in England in bringing over, not merely the Cabinet, but Parliament, to his views. He needed both men and money, and in November the House of Commons responded with unwonted alacrity to his demands, and, to his great satisfaction, did so without insisting on the disclosure of the plan of campaign. He was therefore able to reorganize the army, and greatly to augment it as a fighting force by reinforcements, which he lost no time in sending to Flanders. When asked awkward questions, the Duke airily spoke of impending military operations on the Moselle. Neither the Queen nor Lord Godolphin knew all that was in his mind, and the Duchess was still more in the dark. There was only one man who knew his secret, and that was Prince Eugene of Savoy, the most chivalrous and capable soldier in the service of the Empire.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MARCH TO BLENHEIM

THE position of the Duchess of Marlborough as the power behind the Throne in England was recognized in every Court in Europe before the Duke had won the first of his great battles. Ambassadors and Envoys to the English Court found that they had to reckon with the imperious Mistress of the Robes, on whose judgment Queen Anne relied, even more than on that of the statesmen who were responsible for the government of the nation. Nowhere was the ascendancy of the Duchess better known than at Versailles. Madame de Maintenon was alive to it, and so were the statesmen and courtiers who surrounded Louis XIV. The same impression concerning her prevailed at the Imperial Court of Vienna. The Emperor Leopold I., long before Marlborough's military genius saved the throne by the Battle of Blenheim, was well aware that there stood by the side of his ally, Queen Anne, a woman of splendid gifts and almost boundless ambition.

The Archduke Charles of Austria, younger son of Leopold, was proclaimed King of Spain at Vienna in 1703, and on his progress to take possession of his throne he arrived at Düsseldorf in October of that year, at the very moment when Marlborough was arranging the winter-quarters of his army. Charles at once received the Duke in private audience, and treated him with marked distinction. Marlborough proffered the congratulations of Queen Anne, and,

bowing with courtly grace, added: "I have just had the honour of putting your Majesty in possession of Limburg." Charles replied: "I hope to be yet more indebted to your valour;" and, taking from his side a sword richly set with diamonds, he presented it to the Duke, with the gracious words: "I am not ashamed to own that I am a poor Prince, having no other inheritance than my cloak and my sword. The latter may be of use to your Grace, and I hope you will not esteem it the less because I have worn it." The Duke kissed the hilt, and answered: "It acquires an additional value in my eyes because your Majesty has condescended to wear it. It will always remind me of your just right to the Spanish crown, and of my obligation to hazard my life and all that is dear to me in rendering you the greatest Prince of Christendom."<sup>1</sup>

A month later Charles landed in England to pay his respects to the Queen, and the Duke, who had returned from The Hague a day or two earlier, received the Queen's commands to meet His Majesty at Portsmouth and conduct him to Windsor. Whilst there the King showed the appreciation felt at the Court of Vienna for the Duchess by taking from his own finger a ring of great value and presenting it to the Mistress of the Robes. Two days later, but not before he had honoured the Duke and Duchess by accepting their hospitality, Charles embarked for Lisbon to take possession of the throne of Spain. He was ruler of that country until 1709, when the death of his brother, Joseph I., recalled him to Austria as the Emperor Charles VI.

In the spring of 1704, the Duke, after a flying visit to The Hague, finally quitted England to resume the war, with the knowledge that it was no longer to be a matter of sieges, but pitched battles, which would

<sup>1</sup> "Life of John, Duke of Marlborough," by Thomas Lediard (1736).

determine the fate of Europe. He left Harwich on the 19th of April with his brother, General Churchill, the Earl of Orkney, and other officers in high command. But he sailed from that little seaport ruffled and depressed, for the Duchess had a fit of the spleen, and at the last moment placed in his hand an angry letter. He read it as he crossed the sea, and his own mood grew reckless. It seemed to him just then as if the best thing that could happen to him would be to die in the service of his country. But a day or two later, when he arrived at The Hague, though his wife's undeserved reproaches still rankled in his mind, he dismissed them at the call of duty. Responsibilities vast and complicated confronted him, and he therefore brought his indomitable will and his cool, alert intellect, as well as his patriotism, his patience, and his skill, to the solution of the problem. That problem was twofold: it demanded the resources of diplomacy as well as those of military genius. He had to humour and conciliate the States-General on the one hand, and on the other to prove himself a more consummate master of strategy than even the most illustrious of all the Marshals of France.

His first difficulty was with the Dutch, whose statesmen, with the solitary exception of Heinsius, were timid, obstinate, and vacillating. They seemed to care nothing about the fate of Austria so long as the soil of Holland was free from invasion. The Dutch generals were quarrelsome, jealous, and at cross-purposes. They disliked Marlborough's position as Commander-in-Chief, and preferred to settle down for a leisurely siege rather than boldly to take the offensive in a foreign country. Overkirk was the most competent of them, but he sometimes threw the Duke's plans into confusion by running where he was not sent. Slangenberg was an opinionated man of impossible temper, who a year later was dismissed

from the service. Opdam was scarcely less headstrong, and had already suffered defeat at the hands of Marshal Boufflers through his own incautious folly. Athlone and Saarbruck, who were brave and capable soldiers, had both recently died, or these men would never have been in command. The Duke had also to reckon with Prince Lewis of Baden, who was old, stupid, timid, and, unhappily, exceedingly tenacious of his rights as a reigning Prince. But Marlborough's mortal antipathy was the Field Deputies. They were a sort of Committee of Defence, appointed by the States-General to accompany the troops to the front. Although civilians, they obtruded their advice on the Duke in season and out, sometimes absolutely forbidding him to go into action, when, in their judgment, the chance of victory seemed remote. Once the Duke was asked how it came about that Alexander the Great passed so swiftly from victory to victory, whilst the siege of one or two towns was all that there was to show in the present war for a year's campaign. "Alexander the Great," Marlborough instantly replied, "was never obstructed in his camp by Field Deputies."<sup>1</sup> He must have chuckled as he made that response, for he carried in the breast of his uniform vague secret instructions that he meant to interpret liberally—instructions which meant deliverance from such meddlesome men.

Marlborough saw clearly that, if Austria was to be saved from invasion and Vienna was not to be sacked, he must leave the Dutch to protect the Low Countries from any attack by Villeroy, whilst he measured swords in Bavaria, which was now to be the theatre of war, with the Elector and Marshal Marsin. The Elector of Bavaria, France's only ally, had massed his troops at Ulm, and Marsin was already there at

<sup>1</sup> "Court and Society from Elizabeth to Anne, edited from the Papers at Kimbolton by the Duke of Manchester," two vols.; London, 1864; vol. ii., p. 20.

the head of a French army. Tallard was hastily preparing, with the finest army which Louis possessed, to strike through the Black Forest to join him for the concerted march on Vienna. France called every available man to its standard in the winter of 1703-04, with the result that Louis XIV. had eight distinct armies in the field in 1704. Louis was quick to see the strategical importance of Bavaria, and so he poured his troops to the help of the Elector, who was impatient to cross the frontiers of Austria. It looked in the spring of 1704 as if the Holy Roman Empire was to be shattered by the armies of France and Bavaria. The plan of Louis was to crush the imperial troops between cross-fires. The Elector, with Tallard and Marsin, was to advance against Austria, whilst Prince Rakóczy, at the head of the revolted Hungarians, was to cut off their retreat. The position of the Emperor was desperate, and ramparts were hastily thrown up around Vienna—a sufficient proof of the universal consternation.

Marlborough saw that he must strike at once, or all his plans would miscarry; and therefore, whilst he talked airily to the Dutch about a campaign on the Moselle, he had made up his mind, with or without their help, to march across Germany and give battle to the Elector and Marsin before they could strike the proposed blow on Vienna. The Dutch raised all sorts of difficulties, even to the proposed campaign on the Moselle. They did not want to take the aggressive; they had the fear of Villeroy before their eyes. It was only when Marlborough declared that to the Moselle he would go, whether or not their troops accompanied him, that they reluctantly gave way. Whilst these negotiations were still proceeding, the Duke disclosed his real designs to Godolphin for the first time in a letter from The Hague written on the 29th of April:

“ By the next post, I shall be able to let you know what resolutions I shall bring these people to, for I have told them that I shall leave this place on Saturday. My intentions are to march all the English to Coblenz, and to declare there that I intend to command on the Moselle, but when I come there, to write to the States that I think it absolutely necessary for saving the Empire to march with the troops under my command to join those in Germany that are in Her Majesty's and the Dutch pay. The army I propose to have there will consist of upwards of 40,000 men. What I now write, I beg may be known to nobody but Her Majesty and the Prince.”<sup>1</sup>

The only other men in his confidence were Prince Eugene and the Dutch statesman Heinsius, on whose loyalty he could absolutely depend.

Five days later the Duke's tact and patience triumphed; the States-General consented to the proposed campaign on the Moselle, and the English army, with such Dutch regiments as could be spared, was in motion for Coblenz; whilst Overkirk, with the main body of the army of Holland, was left to protect the Netherlands against any attack from Marshal Villeroy. Just as the Duke set out, a letter was put into his hand from England which sent him forward with a light heart. The Duchess had relented, and wrote to him in terms of warm endearment, and even proposed to come and join him, which was, of course, impossible. He took her former angry letter out of his strong-box and burnt it, and, busy as he was with the movement of the troops, wrote back the same day telling her that he “ would keep the letter ” she had just sent him, so that he might have it in his power to read on the march. He had misgivings at the time that he would never see her again, so he added that it would be found in his strong-box when he was dead. “ You have by this kindness preserved

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.



my quiet, and I believe my life, for till I had this letter I had been very indifferent what should become of myself."<sup>1</sup>

France up to this time had not reckoned with the genius of Marlborough, either in council or in war. He had besieged a few towns, but had fought no great battle. Louis XIV. knew him as an alert, dashing soldier, but he flattered himself that Marlborough was no match for any of his own renowned Marshals. The opinion at Versailles was that Marlborough had been outwitted, and that Vienna was already at the mercy of France. But the Duke and Prince Eugene had not been idle in the winter. They had corresponded by cipher, had concerted their plans, and had even appointed the secret rendezvous, where their troops were to assemble, hundreds of leagues away from Holland.

The Duke, as he set out on that wonderful march, told the Duchess that he would despatch a letter to her from every place where the troops halted, and, happily, a few of them have been preserved amongst the archives of Blenheim. Several of them miscarried. Just before the Battle of Blenheim the Duke had, as he puts it, the "spleen," because five letters in succession which he had written to the Duchess had failed to reach her. "It would be a cruel thing if instead of you having them, they shou'd goe to France," he said to her in a sixth which safely reached her.<sup>2</sup> She could scarcely write to him, for his movements were uncertain. He did not know how long the march would last, or where it might be necessary to rest the brave soldiers and tired horses of an army that was passing through a country that was quite unknown to him. Every day he was riding forward with the cavalry to reconnoitre, leaving the infantry and artillery to follow as

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

best they might. Villeroy was watching his movements, and, to throw him off his guard, Marlborough first advanced to Bonn, which confirmed the French in their belief about a campaign on the Moselle. But he only halted a day, and then pushed on to Coblenz. Prince Lewis of Baden was left to defend the fortified lines on the right bank of the Rhine against Tallard, who, however, gave him the slip, and, passing through the Black Forest, hastened with all speed to join the Elector. Before the Duke knew of this reverse, he wrote to the Duchess from Maestricht, on the 4th of May, 1704, just as he was starting for Coblenz:

“Your kindness has given me so much heart that if the Germans can hinder the French from joining more troops to the Elector of Bavaria till I get thither, I do not doubt, with the blessing of God, but we shall have good success, for the troops I carry with me are very good, and will do whatever I will have them. I do, from my soul, wish that we may have good success for many reasons, but for none so much as that I may end my days in happiness with you, my dearest soul.”<sup>1</sup>

When the English army appeared before Coblenz, the French, though puzzled, still believed that Marlborough meant to give battle on the Moselle. In reality he was gathering together his reinforcements from various outposts on the Rhine, and doing so with the utmost despatch. Then he went on to Mayence, and did so for the same purpose, and the French thought that he had changed his plans and meant to attack Alsace. From the camp at Broaubach he wrote on the 16th of May to the Duchess:

“If flattery could make me happy, Count Wratislaw, that came to me yesterday, has said so much from the Emperor that I am ashamed to repeat it to you. But I hope the Queen will have the good effects of it, for it is certain that if these troops I bring had

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

not come to his assistance he would have run great risk of losing his Crown, which he seems to be very sensible of."

The Emperor Leopold doubtless gained his knowledge of Marlborough's bold move from Prince Eugene, and his gratitude knew no bounds. Two days later the Duke reached Mayence, and from there he wrote:

"I have seen several very fine woods in my march which I have wished at St. Albans or The Lodge (at Windsor), for my thoughts are often there."<sup>1</sup>

He did not linger at Mayence, but, marching out of it suddenly, threw his army across the Neckar, and advanced by forced marches through the duchy of Würtemberg. Then, and only then, did it flash upon the French that Marlborough meant to give battle to the Elector at Ulm. The tidings were received with a shock of surprise at Versailles. Louis XIV. had never dreamed that the Duke would venture to carry his army so far afield. Even in England the news was received with misgivings. People shook their heads, and declared that Marlborough must have lost his senses. He was bitterly attacked; and whilst some were for his impeachment if he ever returned, others went so far as to say that in that case he would deserve to lose his head. He had plunged into the unknown, and the nation held its breath in troubled and indignant suspense.

The chief officers of Marlborough's staff on that hazardous march, which was to culminate three months later in the victory of Blenheim, ought not to be forgotten. They were all well-tried soldiers, who had won distinction in the campaigns of William III. Next to Marlborough in command was his brother, General Charles Churchill, who had served in Tangiers and fought at Sedgemoor. He was in command of the whole body of the infantry.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

The four Lieutenant-Generals were John, Lord Cutts; the Hon. Henry Lumley; George, Earl of Orkney; and Richard Ingoldsby. Lord Cutts was one of the most dashing officers in the Queen's service, the leader of forlorn hopes in battle, where he seemed to have a charmed life. His brother officers called him "Salamander" Cutts, because he always came out of the hottest fire unscathed. General Lumley, brother of the Earl of Scarborough, was an old soldier who had won distinction at the siege of Namur, and was destined to play a brave part in all Marlborough's great battles. George, Earl of Orkney, fought at the Battle of the Boyne, was one of the most trusted and capable soldiers of King William, and was present in every general action and at most of the sieges under Marlborough. General Ingoldsby had won renown in the expedition to the French coast in 1692, as well as at Namur. The Major-Generals were Cornelius Wood, one of the best cavalry officers in Marlborough's army (he was wounded at Schellenberg); Henry Withers, who had seen active service in Tangiers and Flanders; and the Hon. Charles Ross, another cavalry officer, who had formerly been in command of a picked regiment of dragoons.

Amongst the Brigadier-Generals—there were eight of them on the Duke's staff—were General Webb, who afterwards won a victory over the French at Wynendael, for which he received the thanks of Queen and Parliament, and was wounded at Malplaquet; General Ross, who was in command of the brigade which opened the attack at Blenheim, and who fell gloriously leading the charge; General Meredith, who was wounded both at Schellenberg and at Oudenarde; and Lord John Hay (afterwards second Marquis of Tweeddale, Colonel of the Scots Guards), who distinguished himself at Schellenberg, Blenheim, and Ramillies. Marlborough's chief Aides-de-Camp

were Colonel Bringfield, who was killed at Ramillies; Colonel Parke, the bearer of the hasty note which the Duke wrote on horseback announcing the victory of Blenheim; Lord Tunbridge, son of the Earl of Rochford, who carried to Windsor the Duke's second and more deliberate despatch about the battle; and Colonel Panton, who served at Malplaquet.

The Duke's secretary was Adam Cardonnel, who had held the post of Chief Clerk at the War Office prior to the Blenheim campaign. Dr. Francis Hare, who had been tutor to the Marquis of Blandford at Cambridge, and was afterwards Bishop of Chichester, was Chaplain-General, and was present in that capacity at Schellenberg and Blenheim; and he wrote a "Journal" of his military experiences, which remains in manuscript at Blenheim. There were not a few grey-haired officers in Marlborough's army—regimental Colonels, Majors, and Captains, who had stood fire again and again in stubbornly-contested battles in previous reigns.

Marlborough's letters to the Duchess during the anxious weeks of May and June, though they speak now of torrential rain and now of fierce heat, give no hint of the tremendous difficulties which beset him, especially in the transport of artillery, ammunition, and stores, along the ill-made and often steep roads of Germany. He writes from the camp at Garbach, near the little town of Heilbron, on the 28th of May, expressing his pleasure at an autograph letter of the Emperor which Count Wratislaw had just shown him:

"His Majesty commands the Count to assure me that he is sensible of my having done all that is possible for saving his country, and that he should be glad to do anything that is in his power to show his gratitude. If I have success my name here will not die for some time, which is a pleasure to me, though I should be ill used by my own country. These are vain thoughts, but, my soul, I have no lasting happi-

ness but when I think I am beloved of you and what I am doing is for the Queen's honour and glory.'"<sup>1</sup>

He tells the Duchess that all sorts of people, from the highest to the lowest, show him respect, and make "all the acknowledgement imaginable for his march." She need not be concerned about him, for he has "all the agreeableness that this sort of life can give." Then his thoughts turn to his home, and he expresses his longing to be "quietly walking" in the garden at St. Albans, or "riding in" your park.<sup>2</sup>

Three days later he writes to tell the Duchess that he has just met Prince Eugene, and that on the morrow he hopes to join forces with Prince Lewis of Baden. Prince Eugene had been appointed in the previous year to the supreme command of the Imperial troops—a position to which he had risen by his victories over Marshal Villeroy and the Duc de Vendôme in the Italian campaigns of the War of the Spanish Succession.

Marlborough, having crossed the winding Neckar for the second time, was at Mindelheim, where he halted three days in order that the infantry and artillery which were struggling along execrable roads, and had in consequence been left far behind in the march, could come nearer to the cavalry, which, under his own command, were leading the advance. Prince Eugene was a man of forty when, leaving his headquarters, he galloped across country with scarcely any bodyguard, in order to meet Marlborough. They met for the first time on the 30th of May, 1704. French by birth, he would have been fighting for that nation if Louis XIV. had not chilled his ardour by refusing to give him a regiment. He had been trained for the Church, and possibly that had something to do with the King's refusal, which was probably due

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

to Madame de Maintenon's scruples. Eugene in consequence entered the service of the Emperor Leopold, and by dint of valour and skill won the rank of a Field-Marshal at the age of thirty. Marlborough, though he possessed, in Lord Chesterfield's words, a charm which neither man nor woman could resist, had, curiously, few close friendships. But he had not been twelve hours in the company of Prince Eugene before he recognized the noble character and winning personal qualities of a soldier who was as chivalrous as he was able. He gave instantly his absolute confidence to the Prince, and through all the storm and stress, the good report and evil, of the years which followed, it was never betrayed. Marlborough declared that he loved Prince Eugene as a brother, and this personal attachment was returned without stint.

In a letter written (June 4) when the Prince had been four days in camp at Ebersbach, Marlborough tells the Duchess that Prince Eugene reminds him a great deal of Lord Shrewsbury, with the advantage of seeming franker.<sup>1</sup> Eugene put the Duke on his guard in relation to Prince Lewis of Baden.

The Prince told him, as they marched from Mindelheim to Great Heppach, where the Duke reviewed his cavalry next day, that he had never seen horsemen so well equipped. "Money," he added, "of which you have no want in England, can buy clothes and accoutrements, but nothing can purchase the spirit which I see in the looks of your men."<sup>2</sup> It recalled to Marlborough the compliment which, at an earlier stage of his march, the Elector of Treves had paid him when he said that all his officers looked as if they were dressed for a ball. "My troops," he now replied to the Prince, "are always animated

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Hare's MS. Journal, Blenheim.

with zeal for the common cause, but they are now inspired by your presence—we owe to you that spirit which awakens your admiration.”<sup>1</sup>

The Duke’s own spirits rose when Prince Eugene told him that the Court of Vienna was filled already with the praise of Queen Anne, and that his royal mistress’s health was drunk in every city of the land as the saviour of the Empire. In telling the Duchess of this, he adds :

“ I pray God we may have success, and then Her Majesty’s name will be ever glorious here, and I shall have a prospect of ending my days happily with you.”<sup>2</sup>

During the three days that Prince Eugene and Marlborough were together they were joined by Prince Lewis of Baden, who had brought his main army thither after detaching a portion of it to protect the Rhine. But news had already arrived in the camp that Villeroy was hastening with his army to join Tallard at Landau, in order to force the passage of the river, and the Duke therefore urged Lewis to return, and to leave Prince Eugene and himself to direct operations on the Danube. But the Prince stood stiffly on his rights and refused to go, and in consequence, much to Marlborough’s regret, it was arranged that Prince Eugene should take command on the Rhine, and that the command of the united army should devolve on alternate days on the Duke and Prince Lewis.

His next letter to the Duchess was written from Langenau, near the Danube. On the way thither he had effected a junction with the main body of Lewis’s army, and had received the gratifying tidings that his own infantry and artillery, under General Churchill, were rapidly approaching, in spite of the

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, “Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. i., p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Blenheim Papers.



heavy rain—it had fallen steadily for six days—which rendered the roads almost impassable:

“As I was never more sensible of heat in my life than I was a fortnight ago, we have now the other extremity of cold, for as I am now writing (it was the middle of June) I am forced to have fire in a stove in my chamber, but the poor men that have not such conveniences I am afraid will very much suffer from these continuous rains. As they do us no hurt here, they do good to Prince Eugene on the Rhine, so we must be contented with taking the bad with the good. I think I should have more content of mind if Prince Eugene were in the place of Prince Lewis.”<sup>1</sup>

He had taken the measure of the testy old German Prince, and declared that he found that he needed to be on his guard. The army had now reached a mountainous country, and had to thread its way through the narrow pass of Gieslingen—a march of extreme difficulty. Dr. Hare, the Duke’s chaplain, states in his *Journal* that at this stage of Marlborough’s march all the surrounding country was devastated by fire.

“The Duke ordered a stop to be put to it, in the hope that the peasants would return to the villages that were yet standing and reap the corn, which now begun to shed as it stood. The cavalry had not great occasion for it, because they had plenty of oats and very good hay from the meadows lying near the rivulets, which everywhere abound in this country. His Grace also spared the woods, which are stately and numerous, consisting entirely of tall fir-trees and pinasters, without the mixture of any other wood.”<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile the Elector of Bavaria had advanced from Ulm to a strongly entrenched camp, to await the arrival of Tallard, and, in order to protect the town of Donauwerth, had detached General D’Arco, with a strong force of infantry and cavalry, to hold

<sup>1</sup> *Blenheim Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> Hare’s *MS. Journal*, *Blenheim*, p. 66.

the Schellenberg, a thickly wooded and lofty hill, just above the town of Donauwerth, commanding the Danube. As Marlborough approached Donauwerth, the main body of his army came within a few miles, and, in spite of the long march, the soldiers looked alert and in excellent health. He wrote to the Duchess from Giengen (June 13, 1704), just as he was coming within striking distance of the Elector:

"It is not only by yours but by others I find that there are several people (in England) that would be glad at my not having success in this undertaking. I am very confident, without flattering myself, that it is the only thing that was capable of saving us from ruin, so that whatever the success shall be, I shall have the inward satisfaction to know that I have done all that was in my power, and that none can be angry with me for the undertaking but such as wish ill to their country and their religion, and with such I am not desirous of friendship."<sup>1</sup>

Marlborough arrived at the Schellenberg at the close of a long day's march. The hill was strongly fortified, his own troops were tired, and he would have delayed the attack if the position had not been critical. It was rendered so because the enemy were making the place wellnigh impregnable. Moreover, Prince Lewis would be in command on the morrow, and the Duke knew that he would not go into action then. It was this knowledge which made him exclaim: "Every hour we lose will cost us a thousand men."<sup>2</sup> Marlborough never appealed to his brave soldiers in vain, and when he called them to storm the heights of Schellenberg, weary as they were, they instantly responded. Many of his soldiers were young fellows who had never been under fire, but they charged up the hill, only to be driven back with

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers; also cited by Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 170

great slaughter. Quickly they rallied, and again attempted to take it by storm, only once more to be repulsed. The third charge was led by Prince Lewis himself, eager to wipe out the stain of his own recent defeat by Villeroy. This time the Bavarians gave way, and the stronghold was captured (July 2, 1704). It meant the passage of the Danube, and cleared the road for the decisive victory of Blenheim.

Only the advance guard of Marlborough's army was in action at Schellenberg, and when the attack commenced under General Goor, a Dutch officer on whom the Duke placed the utmost reliance, and who fell mortally wounded, the Bavarians, apart from their entrenched position, had the advantage in numbers. It was only when the regiments of Prince Lewis hastened up that the tide of battle was turned. The Duke directed the movements of the troops, and, though within range of the enemy's guns, escaped unscathed. The fighting began shortly after six in the evening, and lasted an hour and a half. Fifteen hundred men were killed and four thousand wounded on the side of the Allies, and the loss in officers was unusually heavy. Thirteen thousand men had defended the hill, and not more than two thousand re-joined the Elector's army. They were not all killed in action, but in their headlong flight, pursued in the darkness by Marlborough's cavalry, they crowded on to a long wooden bridge which broke under their weight, and many perished in the Danube. The victors as well as the vanquished suffered on that terrible July night, for rain fell heavily through the whole course of it on wounded men, whom it was impossible to succour before the dawn.

Next day the Duke despatched an official account of the action to Mr. Secretary Harley, and, busy as he was with the care of the wounded, found time—though, as he said, he was so tired he could hardly

hold a pen—to write both to the Queen and to the Duchess.

“ I must humbly presume to inform your Majesty that the success of our first attack on the enemy has been equal to the justice of the cause your Majesty has so graciously and zealously espoused. Mr. Secretary Harley will have the honour to lay the relation of yesterday’s action before you. To which I shall crave leave to add that our success is in great measure owing to the particular blessing of God and the unparalleled bravery of your troops. I shall endeavour to improve the happy beginning of your Majesty’s glory and the benefit of your Majesty’s allies.”<sup>1</sup>

His letter to the Duchess was written from the camp at Obermergen (July 7, 1704):

“ I think myself so happy in my dearest soul’s love that I know she will be better pleased with two lines than I am well after the action we had yesterday than volumes upon another occasion. It has pleased God after a very obstinate defence to have given us the victory by which we have ruined the best of the Elector’s foot, for there was very little horse. My Lord Treasurer will let you see Mr. Secretary Harley’s letter, if you care to see about what the action was. The English foot has suffered a good deal, but none of your acquaintance are hurt, but Mr. Meredyth and Major-General Wood, neither in danger. Now that I have told you the good news I must tell the ill news, which is that the Marshal Villeroy has promised the Elector of Bavaria that he will send him, by the way of the Black Forest, fifty battalions of foot and sixty squadrons of horse, as he tells him in his letter, the best troops of France, but I rely very much on the assurances Prince Eugene gave me yesterday by his Adjutant-General, that he would venture the whole rather than suffer them to pass quickly as the last did. I have given myself the honour of writing to the Queen on this occasion. Let my dear children know I am well. You may let the Lord Treasurer

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, I., 175.

know that I think the English have done so well that the Cannon ought to fire for this victory."<sup>1</sup>

Queen Anne, immediately on receiving the tidings of victory, wrote from Kensington, congratulating the Duke:

" May this campaign end as gloriously as it has begun, and that you may have all the happiness your own heart can desire is sincerely wished by her, who is—

" Affectionately yours,  
"ANNE R."<sup>2</sup>

The position of the Duchess was so powerful at this period that Harley wished to ingratiate himself with her. He wrote accordingly, as soon as the Schellenberg despatch was in his hands, a letter which reads curiously when regarded in the light of his subsequent treatment both of her and the Duke. It has lingered until now amongst the Blenheim Papers, but, since it reveals the man, it may be cited:

" *July 17, 1704.*

" MADAM,

" Though the advantage the public receives from this great and glorious victory at Schellenburg is enough to inspire everyone's heart with joy who loves either the Queen or the nation, yet I must profess I have a peculiar satisfaction—it enhances the blessing to me by the hand that wrought it. I should have had a share in common with the rest of the nation, if another had performed it; but when the Duke of Marlborough is the author, when our deliverance, I may call it, is owing to his courage and his conduct, when the English honour is not only retrieved, but carried to so great a height, I cannot but receive an additional pleasure that it is done by my Lord Duke. I hope your Grace will forgive this

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Blenheim Papers.

overflowing of joy as an instance of that sincerity and duty wherewith I shall always endeavour to distinguish myself.

“ Madam, your Grace's most humble and  
most obedient servant,

“ ROBERT HARLEY.”<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess must have tossed her head when she read that letter. She already knew that Mr. Secretary Harley, in spite of what she called his “ fine words,” was not to be trusted.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

## CHAPTER XII

### "'T WAS A GLORIOUS VICTORY"

MARLBOROUGH imagined that the Bavarians would stoutly defend a town as strongly fortified as Donauwerth; but the Elector, who had watched from the farther bank of the Lech the defeat of his troops at Schellenberg, hastily fell back towards Augsburg, where he massed his army, to await the arrival of the advancing French reinforcements under Tallard. Hence, without the loss of so much as another trooper, the Duke two days after Schellenberg was in possession of Donauwerth.

"We could not have taken this place in ten days," he wrote to the Duchess, "if the garrison had not been frightened by the action they saw two days ago. In truth, it is very plain that if Her Majesty's troops had not been here, the Elector of Bavaria had now been in Vienna. Since the action I have hardly had time to sleep, for General Goor helped me in a great many things which I am now forced to do myself."<sup>1</sup>

Marlborough at once determined to carry the war into the heart of the Elector's territory; but this was not easy, for before him lay the Lech, deep, broad, and rapid, and all the bridges across it had been destroyed by the enemy. General Cadogan, who held the post of Quartermaster-General, threw pontoons across the river at Gunderkingen, and on the 9th of July the whole army crossed the Lech. The Bavarian garrison at Neuburg, which had been left to defend

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

the passage, were taken by surprise by this rapid movement, and fell back on Ingoldstadt—a fortress which was considered impregnable, and which commanded the Danube.

Writing from his headquarters whilst the army was slowly crossing the bridges, Marlborough told the Duchess (July 9):

“I am extremely pleased to know that I have it now in my power that the poor soldiers shall not want bread. I have the great pleasure to find all the officers willing to obey without knowing any other reason than that it is my desire, which is very different from what it was in Flanders, where I was obliged to have the consent of a Council of War for everything I undertook.”<sup>1</sup>

The Elector, disconcerted at Marlborough's rapid advance, showed signs of yielding. This is plain from a letter which the Duke wrote to the Duchess on the 16th of July from the camp of Burcheim:

“When I wrote my last there was a great deal of reason to believe the Elector had resolved to make his peace, but now all that matter is at an end, he having told Count Wratislaw, by his secretary, that it was not in his power to leave the French, since they had given him assurances that the Mareschal de Tallard should in less than ten days join him with thirty-five thousand men. We are so advanced in Bavaria that we cannot hinder their joining, but we hope Prince Eugene will be able to do it, we having lent four thousand horse to him.”<sup>2</sup>

Marlborough, with the hope of bringing the Elector to terms, but much against his personal inclinations, now began to ravage the country, and villages and towns on the road to Munich were destroyed by fire. He would have attacked that city if Prince Lewis had not blundered in failing to bring up the artillery. Meanwhile Marshal Tallard, after a forced march through the Black Forest, was approaching the

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



Elector's army at Augsburg; whilst Prince Eugene, who had failed to arrest his progress, with 18,000 men was hastening to Hochstadt to get into touch with Marlborough. The position of the Allies was critical. If Prince Eugene advanced through Bavaria, the Elector's army was almost certain to cross the Danube and break the communication with Franconia and Würtemberg. If Marlborough, on the other hand, retraced his steps to join forces with Eugene, the enemy would be in a position to force them to abandon the whole country south of the Danube.

It was absolutely necessary that the fortress of Ingoldstadt should be reduced, for whilst it held out the Allies were in imminent jeopardy. The Duke persuaded Prince Lewis of Baden to undertake the siege, and this left him in supreme and unchallenged command. He writes to the Duchess on the 10th of August:

" Prince Lewis is marched with thirty squadrons and twenty-four battalions to make the siege of Ingoldstadt, and I have taken measures with Prince Eugene for opposing the Elector and two Mareschals, and as they marched yesterday towards the Danube, I sent this morning early the Duke of Würtemberg with twenty-eight squadrons, and my brother with twenty battalions, to strengthen Prince Eugene's army, and have assured him that if they pass the Danube, I will join him with the rest of this army."<sup>1</sup>

Tallard had by this time reached the Elector, and Prince Eugene and Marlborough, after endless difficulties, had brought their armies into touch on the banks of the Danube. Two days later, on the 12th of August, the artillery and baggage, for which the Duke and Prince Eugene were waiting, came upon the scene. The artillery arrived just in the nick of time, for the French and Bavarians were drawn up in force

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

near the little town of Hochstadt, and that day the Duke and Prince Eugene, having galloped out to the village of Dapfheim to reconnoitre, saw the enemy hard at work making a fortified camp a few miles away, across the little river Nebel. Tallard and his army held the village of Blenheim and the ridge of hills behind it. The Elector and Marsin occupied the rising ground between the villages of Lützingen and Oberglau.

It is clear, from a letter written by Tallard to Louis XIV. on the day that the Battle of Blenheim was fought, that he had no idea, until Marlborough ordered the attack, that an action was imminent:

"Our enemies are now in view and ranged as if for action; but according to appearances they will march further this day. The report is that they are going to Nordlingen. If so, they will have to leave us between them and the Danube, and they will find it very hard to maintain the settlements they have made in Bavaria."<sup>1</sup>

But Marlborough had gone as far as he meant on the road to Vienna. He knew that Austria could only be saved if he defeated the great army, which had suddenly come within striking distance of his own troops. He was aware also that Villeroy was hastening to cut off his supplies from Franconia, and that his position was desperate unless he snatched, at all hazards, a decisive victory.

Late on the afternoon of the 12th of August some of his principal officers came to Marlborough's headquarters and requested an interview. They had witnessed the stir in the camp which had followed the Duke's return from Dapfheim, and they ventured to tell him that they thought an attack at that moment was hazardous, since the French and Bavarians were not merely in a strong position, but had already

<sup>1</sup> "Campagnes de Tallard," t. ii., p. 140.

fortified it, and were superior in numbers. The Duke listened quietly and with the courtesy which never deserted him. " I know the danger," he replied, " yet a battle is absolutely necessary, and I rely on the bravery and discipline of the troops, which will make amends for our disadvantages." <sup>1</sup>

At sunset he gave orders that the army was to march before daybreak, to cross the River Kessel in the early morning, and advance with all speed to the banks of the Nebel. All ranks received the command with alacrity. Marlborough knew his men. He sat for an hour alone in his tent that night thinking of his home, the honour of England, and the fate of the Empire, which he knew would be determined on the morrow. Then he summoned his chaplain, Dr. Hare, and received the Sacrament at his hands. He had made up his mind to die or be victorious. After two or three hours of sleep, he rose before daybreak in order to settle with Prince Eugene the final arrangements for the approaching battle.

Meanwhile the English, marching in the dark, crossed the Kessel before three in the morning, and at six o'clock the advance guard came in sight of the enemy. Tallard was taken by surprise; as Marlborough expressed it, " he did not expect so early a visit," but instantly drew up his forces in line and prepared for action. The French and Bavarians were 60,000 strong, and had ninety pieces of artillery. The Allies under Marlborough and Eugene confronted them at Blenheim with 52,000 men and sixty-six pieces of artillery. Marlborough, in supreme command, was on the left, opposite Tallard. Prince Eugene rode at the head of the right wing, and had to reckon with the Elector and Marsin.

At seven o'clock the thick mist of that summer morning, which had screened the advance of Marl-

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, " Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 188.

borough's army from the French, suddenly lifted, and the French, from the high ground which they occupied on the other side of the Nebel, realized that the enemy in force was scarcely more than a mile away. Instantly the alarm was sounded, and with wonderful celerity the order of battle was concerted. The French-Bavarian lines stretched from Lützingen to Blenheim, a distance of between four and five miles. The picked troops of France, 16,000 strong, hastily took up their position in the village of Blenheim, and drew up palisades to fortify the place. Midway in the marshy plain between the Nebel and the Danube was the village of Oberglau, which formed the centre of the French position, whilst stretching away to the left was the high and wooded ground of Lützingen, which Marsin and the Bavarian Elector occupied. The weakness of the French-Bavarian army was that the lines were too extended, and that, whilst the right wing at Blenheim was protected by the palisades and the buildings of that place, and the left wing at Lützingen held a commanding position on high ground, the centre of the army was drawn up too far from the Nebel in order to avoid the marshes. Moreover, whilst the enemy's troops were massed to right and left, the centre at Oberglau was insufficiently protected, in spite of the cavalry which Tallard posted at that point to conceal the weakness of the infantry.

Marlborough was quick to see that there was room for his troops to form across the Nebel, and his engineers were quickly at work constructing pontoons. His aim was to crush the right wing of the French army at the village of Blenheim, and then, by a cavalry charge, to attack the centre at Oberglau whilst Prince Eugene threw his troops against the Elector and Marsin at Lützingen. General Cutts, the most dashing officer in his army, was to open the battle by storming the French position at Blenheim.

Prince Eugene's army came up slowly. The ground proved so treacherous that the artillery could not advance except by a circuitous route, and Marlborough had in consequence to wait all through the long hours of the morning before giving battle. But the time was not lost. The engineers strengthened the stone bridge across the Nebel for the passage of the artillery, and threw five pontoon bridges across the stream at as many strategic points. Whilst this was in process the enemy was busily engaged in fortifying Blenheim with additional palisades, and in making the position which they held at Lützingen almost impregnable.

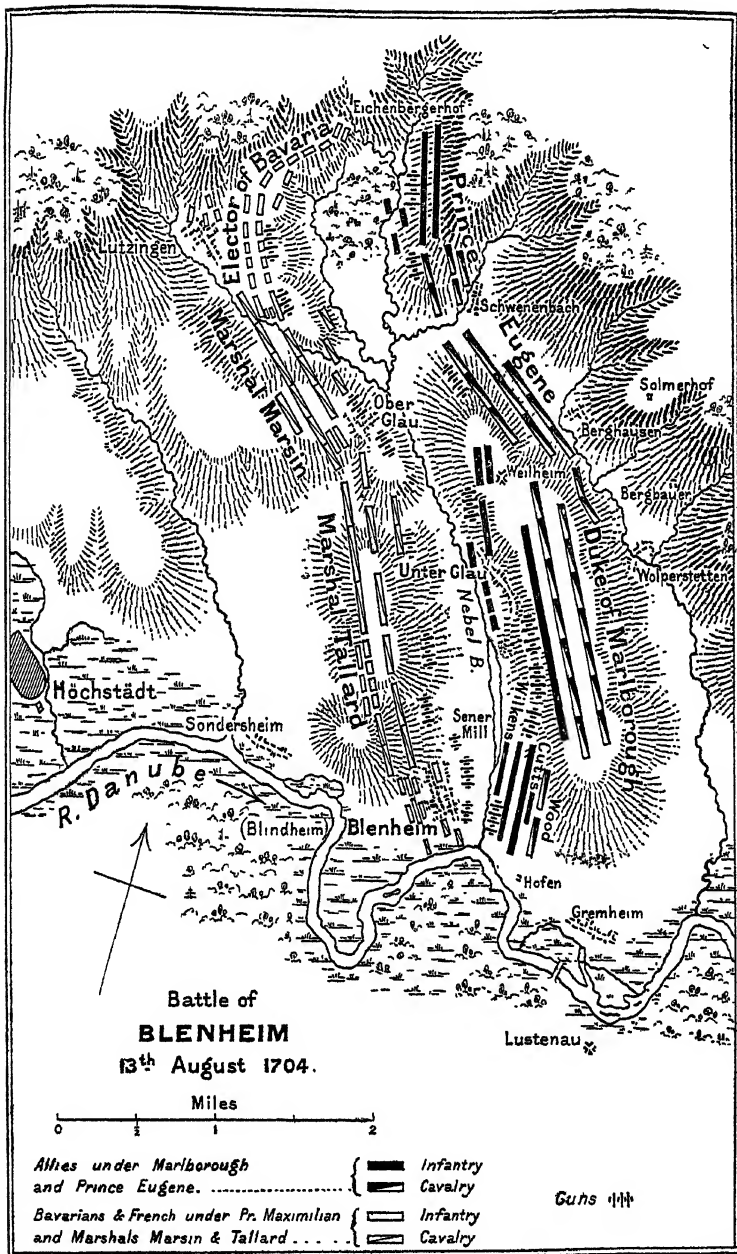
Marlborough's cavalry and infantry were restless at the delay. The French batteries had already opened fire, and the English soldiers were straining at the leash. The Duke, having posted his artillery, ordered the chaplains to the front to read prayers.

" The English chaplains read the service at the head of the English regiments. The Calvinistic chaplains of the Dutch army poured forth their supplications in front of their countrymen. In the meantime the Danes might listen to their Lutheran ministers, and Capuchines might encourage the Austrian squadrons and pray to the Virgin for a blessing on the arms of the Holy Roman Empire."<sup>1</sup>

The Duke declared that he thought he himself prayed more before the battle than all the chaplains in his army.

It was a mixed host which Marlborough led at Blenheim, but they were all as one man in their loyalty to their leader. As soon as this solemn service was over, the Duke, on his white charger, galloped along the lines with a smile and a word of encouragement to each regiment in turn. He

<sup>1</sup> Lord Macaulay, in an article published in the *Edinburgh Review*, April, 1839.



narrowly escaped death as he did so, for a shell from the heights above the Nebel burst close to him, and for a moment he was lost in a cloud of dust. A thrill of consternation ran through the lines. Had the Duke fallen before the battle had begun? was the thought which flashed through the minds of the soldiers. But swiftly the red coat, slashed with the Blue Ribbon of the Garter, was seen again. The Duke was unhurt, and rode on with a smile, amid a sigh of relief from his men.

Just as the hour of noon was striking, an Aide-de-Camp from Prince Eugene was seen riding hard to Marlborough's headquarters. He reined sharply and gave the salute. The Prince was ready. Marlborough sprang at once into his saddle. "Now, gentlemen, to your posts!" he cried, and the battle began. General Cutts led the way, crossing the Nebel by the pontoons with the cavalry under a galling fire. Then the infantry, under Brigadier Row, followed at quick march to the attack on Blenheim. Row's instructions were to storm the palisades. He was to turn the French position at the point of the bayonet. It was the first pitched battle in which that weapon played a prominent part. The infantry were to fire at close quarters, and then press forward with fixed bayonets. When they came within thirty paces of the palisades, they were met by a raking fire which thinned their ranks. But Row, striding to the front, struck the barrier with his sword, and the regiments behind him fired and rushed forward, trying in vain to break through the ambushade. It was a gallant but hopeless attempt. The enemy was not merely in great force, but fought behind cover; and the English line fell back in confusion, but not before Row was mortally wounded. His place was instantly filled by the next officer in command, who was at once slain. The third to lead the troops shared

the same fate, and the gallant men, thrown into confusion by a flank movement of the enemy, fell back, pursued by the French cavalry, who had galloped out of cover.

The situation was critical, and would have ended in hopeless disaster if General Lumley, with five squadrons of horse, had not come to the rescue, Lumley's cavalry charged the French at the point of the sword, and when they wavered and gave way—following them too far in the ardour of battle—were in turn driven back by the musketry fire from the palisades. Encouraged by the success, Tallard pushed forward his artillery until it commanded the bridges, but not before Cutts had brought his second line across the Nebel. Cutts and Brigadier Ferguson led the second attack on Blenheim, and, in spite of shot and shell, carried the outskirts of the village at the point of the bayonet. But after much hard fighting and charges, renewed again and again, they were forced to fall back. The Duke, who was watching the struggle, at once realized that Blenheim was so strongly held and fortified that the right wing of the French position could not, without a ruinous loss of life, be carried by storm. He therefore ordered the troops to take up a less exposed position, and at the same time, by a ceaseless fire of platoons, to keep the enemy on the alert.

The attack now shifted to the centre at Oberglau, for the Duke had detected that that represented the weak spot in the French lines. Marlborough accordingly determined to push his cavalry and some battalions of infantry through the broken and marshy ground which lay on his side of the Nebel, then to cross the stream and carry the village of Oberglau, where the French and Bavarian infantry was massed. It was a hazardous thing to do, for the cavalry could only advance in single file over the fascines and planks



which formed the uneven and slippery path. But the bridge was gained at last, and the troops, splashed with mud, began at once to form in line. Tallard at this juncture made a fatal blunder. He ought to have opened the attack the moment the troops began to appear on his side of the Nebel, but for some reason he hesitated, until Marlborough's regiments were across the stream in sufficient numbers to give a good account of themselves. The brunt of the fighting fell at first on the infantry. They stood in close squares, and had to meet the shock of the French and Bavarian cavalry, which burst, with the sudden violence of a tropical storm, upon them.

Tallard's horse, though led splendidly, could make little impression upon them, though at one point in the battle Marlborough's centre was broken, and the Hanoverians under the Prince of Holstein, whom he had hurled against the rocky heights of Oberglau, were beaten back with great slaughter by the Irish brigade of the French army, and the Prince was taken prisoner. Marlborough at once sent to the rescue of the defeated Hanoverians some fresh squadrons of infantry and artillery, which had now come into action, and forced the Irish brigade back into Oberglau. Up to this point he had kept his cavalry in reserve, but now—it was five o'clock on that fateful summer afternoon—he gave the signal, and the trumpets sounded for the decisive stroke. Eight thousand horsemen in perfect order galloped to the front, and behind them, as if by magic, the infantry formed into battalions. Between the armies lay a long grassy slope, and under cover of Oberglau the French cavalry were drawn up in two lines, which screened batteries of artillery and squares of infantry. The French were in a strong position—just below the crest of the hill.

Marlborough ordered the cavalry to charge, and

rode to the front, cool as ever, to lead the way. Spurring hard, with flashing swords they dashed over the rising ground; but before they reached the ridge the French artillery opened a' deadly fire, and, amid the booming and smoke of the guns, nothing was to be seen for a few minutes, except nodding plumes and the glitter of uplifted swords. The French withstood gallantly the onslaught, and for a few minutes no man could forecast the issue of the deadly struggle. Tallard sent messages to Marsin to bring up the cavalry, but he was hotly pressed in another part of the field, and could not spare so much as a troop. If they had pushed their advantage at that moment, the tide would in all human probability have turned in their favour. The Allies had met with so hot a reception that they fell back sixty paces in confusion. Tallard instantly saw his chance for a counter-stroke. He ordered his cavalry to charge, but they hesitated, when to hesitate was to be lost. "Our cavalry did very ill," was the Marshal's bitter comment, when after the battle he wrote to Louis XIV. about the defeat. He spoke well. The momentary vacillation of the French cavalry meant the loss of all things. It gave time—a few moments are enough in the crisis of battle—for Marlborough to renew the attack. His men rallied quickly, and galloping onwards threw themselves suddenly in an even more impetuous charge on Tallard's lines of horse and infantry, flanked though they were with batteries of artillery. The French quailed before this fierce renewal of the battle; their ranks were broken by it; the infantry were ridden down. Those that were not sabred were hurled to right and left, whilst the cavalry, turning their horses, fled panic-stricken towards the banks of the Danube. Tallard was slow even then to believe that all was lost. The right wing of his army was still holding the village of Blenheim, and they

might be expected to give a good account of themselves, for the regiments posted at that spot represented the flower of the French forces. His aim was to join them with what remained of the left wing of the army. And gathering together the scattered regiments that were still left on the field, he gallantly sought to make his way to the beleaguered village which has given its name to the historic battle. But misfortune now seemed to dog his steps. He was near-sighted, and riding in the gathering gloom with a small body-guard he mistook a German regiment for a part of the French army. He galloped into their midst, and his rank was detected by the star and riband of the Order which he wore. The gallant soldier had, in consequence, no alternative but to hand his sword to the Prince of Hesse. His surrender was quickly followed by that of almost the whole of the French infantry, which were caught as in a trap by Marlborough's advancing army. All that remained was to force the capitulation of the brave men entrenched behind the palisades of Blenheim. Thirty squadrons, panic-stricken, fled towards the Danube, whilst the flower of the French army, which still held Blenheim, found themselves driven to bay by a rapid movement of the Scots Greys and the Queen's Regiment.

The French troops at Blenheim fought desperately, even after they had been left in the lurch by their own commander, de Clairambault, who, in despair, turned his horse to the Danube, and was drowned in attempting to cross the river. When night fell Blenheim was in flames, and by the lurid light of burning houses the troops imprisoned there, again and again charged, in a desperate attempt to break through the investing lines which Marlborough had now drawn closely around the place. The Duke was bringing the artillery into action, when

the enemy, in desperation, sought a parley. Marlborough would listen to nothing but unconditional surrender. The proud regiment of Navarre tore its colours from the standard, and tossed them into the flames that were raging on every hand. The French at Blenheim had fought on in the vain hope that Marsin and the Elector might yet come to their rescue, but they reckoned without Prince Eugene, and as the long twilight deepened into darkness, realized that at last nothing could save them.

"Oh, que dira le Roi, que dira le Roi!" exclaimed the officers, when at last they ordered twenty-four battalions of infantry and four regiments of dragoons to lay down their arms. They were the bravest soldiers of France, and yet, through Tallard's blunder, many of them had not fired a shot all through that terrible day. One of the military maxims of the Duke of Wellington was: "Never attempt to defend a village that is not within reach of musketry." He used to say that Tallard lost the Battle of Blenheim because he sent troops into places beyond the reach of muskets, and at the critical moment was not able to get them back again.<sup>1</sup> There had been rough fighting throughout the day, on the wooded heights round Lützingen, between Prince Eugene and the left wing of the French-Bavarian army under Marsin and the Elector. The Prince had attempted to storm the strong position of the enemy, not once or twice, but four times, and in each case had been driven back with great slaughter; and but for the Prussian infantry, which stood like a rock, against which the Bavarian cavalry dashed in vain like waves of the sea, the fortunes of battle in that quarter would have gone hard. As it was, Prince Eugene, though powerless to capture Lützingen, held his own and inflicted

<sup>1</sup> Stanhope's "Conversations with the Duke of Wellington." London, 1888, p. 109.

heavy losses on the enemy. So the battle stood in that quarter of the field until late in the afternoon, when the cavalry on Marsin's right, which was in touch with Tallard's centre, began to fall back. Prince Eugene, knew by this movement that Marlborough had crushed Tallard's army, and, rallying his troops, pushed his way fighting through the woods and ravines toward Lützingen, only to find, when he arrived there, that the place was in flames, and to see from the heights that Oberglau also was burning, and that the Elector and Marsin were in full retreat.

As night fell, Tallard's left wing scattered and fled in disorder—some towards Hochstädt, others towards Sonderheim. They were pressed hard by Marlborough's cavalry, and the slaughter was terrible. Many prisoners were made, whilst a confused mass of cavalry and infantry were driven into the Danube and were drowned. It was by the resistless shock of a cavalry charge, led by Marlborough in person, that the tide of battle was turned at Blenheim. The infantry instantly followed the advantage up, and the victory was won. Marlborough was seventeen hours in the saddle on that fateful day. "Neither his cool temper nor his presence of mind," declared Major Kane, who was at his side, "ever deserted him. The Duke was in all places, wherever his presence was requisite, without fear of danger, or in the least hurry, giving his orders with all the calmness imaginable."<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the fate of the battle was no longer doubtful, Marlborough, from his saddle, wrote the pencilled note to the Duchess which is historic:

<sup>1</sup> "Narrative of Campaigns in the Reigns of William III. and Queen Anne," by Brigadier-General Richard Kane. London. 1745.

" I have not time to say more, but to beg you will give my duty to the Queen, and let her know her army has had a glorious victory. M. Tallard and two other generals are in my coach, and I am following the rest. The bearer, my aide-de-camp, Colonel Parke, will give her an account of what has pass'd. I shall doe it in a day or two by another more at large.

MARLBOROUGH." <sup>1</sup>

On the morrow of the battle the Duke sent this description of the fight, and it will be as well to give it exactly as it was written:

" *August 14, 1704.*—Before the battaile was quite done yesterday I writ to my dearest soull to lett her know that I was well and that God had bless'd Her Maj<sup>ty</sup>s armes with as great a Victory as has ever been known. For prisoners I have the Mareshall de Tallard and the greatest parts of his Generall Officers, above 8,000 men and near 1,500 officers—in short the Army of Mons<sup>r</sup> de Tallard's which was that which I fought with is quite ruined. That of the Elector of Bavaria and the Mareshal de Marsin which P. Eugene fought against, I am afraid has not had much loss, for I can't find that he has many prisoners. As soon as the Elector knew that Mons<sup>r</sup> de Tallard was like to be beaten, he march'd off, soe that I came only time enough to see him retire. As all these Prisoners are taken by the troupes I comand, it is in my power to send as many of them to England as Her Majesty should think for her honor and service. My own opinion in this matter is that the Mareshall de Tallard and the General Officers should be sent or brought to her Maj<sup>ty</sup> when I come to England, but shou'd all the officers be brought it wou'd be a very great expence to her Maj<sup>ty</sup>, and I think the honour is in having the Mareshall and such other officers as Her Majesty pleases. But I shal doe in this as in all things that which shall be most agreeable to Her. I am soe very much out of order with having been 17 hours on horseback yesterday, and not having been able to sleep above 3 hours last night, that I can write to none of my friends. However I am soe

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 206.

pleas'd with this action, that I can't end my letter without being soe vain as to tell my dearest soul that within the memory of man there has been noe Victory soe great as this, and as I am sure you love me soe intirely well, that you will be infinitely pleas'd with what has been done—upon my account, as well as the great benefitt the Publick will have, for had the success of P. Eugene been equal to his merit, we shou'd in that day's action have made an end of the warr."<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 5,000 men were killed and 7,500 wounded on the side of the Allies. The French loss was 12,000 killed and 14,000 made prisoners, including the Marshal in supreme command and 1,200 officers. The wounded and missing on the French side brought Tallard's losses at Blenheim to nearly 40,000 men. Almost the whole of the cannon and baggage were captured, and 300 standards and regimental flags.

Immediately after the battle, whilst the standards, colours and cannon taken from the enemy were being collected and given into the care of Colonel Blood, who was in command of the artillery, the Duke's thoughts were with the vanquished Marshal Tallard. He set out, accompanied by Prince Eugene and a group of officers, for the quarters of the Prince of Hesse, to whom Tallard had delivered his sword.

" L'illustre prisonnier fut transporté, avec deux ou trois autres généraux, dans le carrosse de Marlborough, au quartier du prince de Hesse, où le général anglois alla lui faire visite le lendemain. ' Je suis fâché,' dit le duc au maréchal, ' qu'un si grand malheur soit arrivé à un guerrier pour qui j'ai la plus haute estime.' ' Et moi,' répondit Tallard, ' je vous félicite d'avoir vaincu les meilleures troupes de l'univers.' ' Permettez-moi,' lui répliqua le duc, ' de croire que les miennes sont les meilleures du monde, puisqu'elles ont vaincu celles que vous regardez comme telles.' "<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers

<sup>2</sup> " Histoire de Jean Churchill, Duc de Marlborough," written at the command of Napoleon I. by the Abbé Dutems, t. ii, p. 11. Paris, de l'Imprimerie Impériale, 1808.

Dr. Hare was in attendance, and he gives in his manuscript "Journal" a description of the interview. The Duke found Tallard "much dejected" at the disaster, and in pain from a wound in one of his hands.

"His Grace desired to know how far it was in his power to make him easy under his misfortune, offering him at the same time the convenience of his quarters and to take him thither in his coach. The Marshal thankfully refused the offer, and said he did not desire to stir until he might have his own equipage. Whereupon his Grace immediately despatched one of his own Trumpets to the Elector's army with a passport for bringing it up to the Marshal. . . . Tallard told the Duke that if his Grace had deferred his visit (meaning his attack) a day longer, the Elector and he would have waited upon his Grace first; and the Duke asking him why they did not on the 12th, when they were expected, the Marshal answered that they were informed Prince Loewis of Baden had joined his Grace with his army from before Ingolstat, and that four prisoners which their squadrons had made that day from our army told them so, and though taken separately, one after another, they all agreed in that intelligence. . . . There were a great many of the French generals with the Marshal, all of whom, crowding about his Grace, admired his person, as well as his tender and generous behaviour towards them. They had all something to say for themselves, which his Grace and Prince Eugene received with the greatest modesty and compassion."

Prince Eugene commended the conduct of the Elector of Bavaria and the valour of his troops. He said that they had bravely repulsed him again and again, and there was not a squadron in his army which, during the battle, had not charged "four times at least."

Hare adds that the Duke remained with Marshal Tallard for more than an hour, and then returned to his own quarters, and gave the order to the army



to march beyond Hochstädt as far as Stenheim. Then he rode over the field of battle from right to left, and looked at the dead of both French and English lying on that hotly-contested field.<sup>1</sup>

Saint-Simon lays stress on Marlborough's kindness to the prisoners, and his words deserve to be cited :

" He treated them all, even the humblest, with the utmost attention, consideration, and politeness, and with a modesty that did him even more honour than his victory."<sup>2</sup>

It was at this moment that the incident which follows occurred :

" Parmi les soldats prisonniers, le duc en reconnut un dont il avoit remarqué et admiré la bravoure pendant l'action. ' Votre maître,' lui dit-il, ' seroit invincible, s'il avoit beaucoup de soldats comme vous.' ' Mon roi,' répondit modestement le prisonnier, ' ne manque pas d'hommes comme moi; mais il manque de généraux comme vous.' "

How the Duke's strategy is regarded by a modern military expert is seen in the words of General Sir Frederick Maurice. He describes Marlborough's dramatic action at this crisis as one of the " grandest strokes of military genius." The Duke saw at a flash that he must strike hard if he was to prevent the destruction of the Austrian Empire by the armies of Louis XIV. He accordingly determined to

" move secretly and with great rapidity along the whole line of the Rhine, in order to join his forces with those of Prince Eugene. Having joined him, he inflicted a great defeat on the French at the Battle of Blenheim, with the result that the Empire of Austria was by that movement saved, and a blow

<sup>1</sup> Hare's unpublished " Journal," p. 105 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> " Memoirs of the Duke of Saint-Simon," vol. i., p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> " Histoire de Jean Churchill, duc de Marlborough," by the Abbé Dutens, t. II., p. 23. Paris, de l'Imprimerie Impériale, 1808.

was inflicted upon France from which she reeled, and from which she hardly recovered during subsequent campaigns."<sup>1</sup>

"Marlborough was renowned for his brilliant handling of cavalry on the field of battle. The promptitude with which he changed his plan of attack, when he found that he was unable to capture Blenheim, and the vigour with which he carried out his scheme of breaking the hostile centre, are equally worthy of admiration."<sup>2</sup>

The French army had a long and proud list of victories to its credit in every part of Europe when Marlborough broke the spell. Blenheim shattered the pride of France. Louis XIV. received the cruel news on the 21st of August by a courier sent by Marshal Villeroy. His Majesty was informed that Tallard's army had been practically destroyed, that no one knew what had become of the Marshal himself, or whether the Elector and Marsin had taken part in the battle. The suspense at Versailles was terrible. It lasted six days, and only ended when an officer, taken prisoner at Blenheim and set free by Marlborough, pledged to make all haste to Versailles, arrived to tell the pitiful story. The tidings reached the Court in the midst of rejoicings at the birth of a great grandson of Louis XIV. The effect was appalling. Every prominent family in France had a relative who was either slain, wounded, or captured. All refrained from telling the direful news to the King, until Madame de Maintenon took upon herself the unwelcome task. Meanwhile Colonel Parke galloped across Europe in another mood, and, crossing the Channel, lost not a moment and said not a word until, late on a beautiful drowsy August after-

<sup>1</sup> "Sir Frederick Maurice; A Record of his Work and Opinions." Edited by his son, Lieutenant-Colonel F. Maurice (1913).

<sup>2</sup> "An Outline of Marlborough's Campaigns," by Captain Maycock, D.S.O., p. 61. London, 1913.

noon, he gained Windsor and sought immediate audience. The letter he carried was addressed to the Duchess. She, like Queen Anne and the whole nation, was full of alarm and foreboding. Not a word had been heard of the Duke's movements since the fight at Schellenberg. All that was known was that the Allies had pushed forward to the Danube. Schellenberg was won in June, and now August was waning. People went about the streets of London through those long weeks of summer with strained and anxious faces, and with the haunting fear of calamity. Some blamed Marlborough for his recklessness in plunging into the heart of Germany, when France, with a more disciplined and superior force, was straining every nerve to crush his attempt to save the Empire. The boastful confidence of victory expressed at the French Court chafed the English people; men feared in their secret hearts that there was good reason for foreboding. No one living to-day will ever know how great was the strain just then on the nation's pride as well as its patience.

Colonel Parke, when he galloped up the Castle Hill at Windsor, found that the Mistress of the Robes was in attendance on the Queen. But his errand brooked no delay, and all ceremony was waived. He was ushered straight into the little turreted chamber, high on the outer wall, which now forms part of the Royal Library, and in which, in memory of that day, his own portrait still hangs. It is called Queen Anne's Closet, for the lofty rooms, now the main rooms of the Library, were then Her Majesty's private apartments. In that little chamber, scarcely more than ten feet long or broad, Queen Anne was seated with the Duchess, close to the windows which command a splendid view of Eton. They were sitting in animated talk beside the tea-urn when " Colonel Parke, Aide-de-Camp to His Grace the Duke of Marl-

borough," was announced. He was one of the most distinguished-looking officers in the British Army—almost as brave as "Salamander" Cutts, nearly as handsome as the great soldier who had sent him. Bending low in salute to the Queen, he handed the crumpled letter he had carried so far to the Duchess. She, as Marlborough designed it should be so, was the first in all England to make known the tidings. It meant glory and honour to Queen Anne. It meant pride and exultation to the nation. To the Duchess it meant instant deliverance from fear, and the high sense that the man who worshipped her had achieved a victory which would make his name immortal. The Duke had won, in spite of all the croakers at home, in spite of gloomy forebodings abroad, in spite of superior numbers, a victory so splendid that to search for its like is in vain, unless imagination travels back through the tumult of centuries to Cressy and Poitiers. The Queen, too elated for words, was content for the moment to say that Colonel Parke should receive the usual 500 guineas bestowed on the bearer of tidings of victory. He, with courtly grace, dropped on his knee, and begged Her Majesty to bestow upon him instead her own portrait. The Queen, with a smile, granted his request. Next day he received Anne's miniature set in diamonds, and with it 1,000 guineas. A portrait of the gallant soldier was painted with the miniature on his breast. He did not wear the Queen's gift long, for he was killed in 1709, in a street riot at Antigua, when Governor-General of the Leeward Islands.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE GRATITUDE OF THE QUEEN AND THE NATION

THE Queen received the tidings of the Battle of Blenheim on the 21st of August, and on the following day wrote from Windsor to the Duke a letter which has hitherto remained in manuscript:

" You will very easily believe that the good news Colonel Parke brought me yesterday was very welcome, but not more I do assure you, than hearing you were well after so glorious a victory, which will not only humble our enemies abroad, but contribute very much to the putting a stop to the ill designs of those at home. I will not give you any account of what passes here, knowing you have it from other hands, but end this with my sincere wishes that God Almighty will continue His protection over you, and send you safe home to the joy of your friends; none I am sure, is more truly and without any compliments so than your faithful servant,

" ANNE R."<sup>1</sup>

Prince George of Denmark—when Colonel Durel, another of the Duke's Aides-de-Camp, arrived a few days later at Windsor with a more detailed account of the battle—wrote:

" I give you a thousand thanks for the great and good news you send me, and assure you that nobody can rejoice more sincerely with you than I do, not only for the public good, but on your own particular (account), being very sensible, after such disappointments as you have met with this year, success must be a double satisfaction to you. That you may never

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

meet with any ill fortune, but always be attended with good and make a glorious end of this campaign, is most heartily wished by your very affectionate friend

“GEORGE.”<sup>1</sup>

That letter also has never been published, and it shows the high regard in which the Prince held Marlborough. He always proved a firm friend both to the Duke and the Duchess, and it was only after his death, four years later, that Harley and Mrs. Masham gained any real ascendancy at Court. If Prince George of Denmark had remained at Queen Anne's side, it is perfectly clear that the last four years of the reign would have been different. It was his death, in 1708, which gave the opportunity to the enemies of the Duke and Duchess to triumph.

On the 7th of September, Queen Anne went in state from St. James's Palace to St. Paul's, to a solemn Thanksgiving Service for the success of her arms, and on the way thither was greeted with continuous acclamations. The Duchess, who sat by her side, shared in the homage of the vast crowds who lined the streets. Evelyn in his “Diary” describes the scene as one of the “utmost pomp and splendour.” He tells us that the Queen's coach was drawn by eight horses, and that the Duchess of Marlborough alone was with her, dressed in “plain garments,” a sharp contrast to Her Majesty, who was “covered with jewels.” Marlborough, the people felt, had raised the glory of England to a height never before attained, and, though he had powerful enemies even then, their mean voices were silenced for the moment. Congratulations poured in upon the Court from all parts of Europe. The Emperor Leopold, whose empire had been saved by the battle, wrote to the Queen in terms that were unusual for a man of

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

his phlegmatic temperament, and in his letter spoke of Marlborough as "His Highness"—a graceful allusion to the newly-conferred Principedom of Mindelheim.

The Queen instantly wrote to the Duke, stating that it was her pleasure that he should accept any honour which the Emperor might confer upon him, and so he became, before that eventful year was ended, Prince of Mindelheim in the Holy Roman Empire. Meanwhile, whilst all the bells throughout the land were ringing in celebration of his victory, and the artillery was booming in the capital, the Duke was following up his triumph in the field by the pursuit of the enemy, who had withdrawn beyond the Rhine, and before that memorable campaign was ended Landau was retaken and Treves and Trarbach were captured. Late in the autumn, when the troops were once more in winter-quarters, after the long and difficult march from Germany, the Duke went on a diplomatic mission to Berlin. He was received by the King of Prussia with marked distinction, and was loaded with costly presents. But the most important result of his mission was the promise from Prussia of a subsidiary call of 8,000 men for the relief of the Duke of Savoy. He also persuaded Prussia to relinquish its claims to the inheritance of King William III., a concession which removed one of the outstanding grievances of the Dutch. Then he went to The Hague, where he met with the reception of a conqueror, and on the 11th of December embarked on one of the Royal yachts, bringing with him Marshal Tallard and other illustrious prisoners, as well as the standards and trophies captured in battle. Four days later he landed in England, and was received at once in audience by the Queen at St. James's. Next day (December 15) he received the congratulations of both Houses of Parliament, and in his reply declared that his triumph

was due, next to the blessing of God, to the courage of the officers and soldiers who had fought under his orders.

Marlborough's return to England was the signal for an outbreak of enthusiasm even more wonderful than that which had been evinced on Thanksgiving Day. It found expression on the 3rd of January, 1705, when the 128 standards he had captured were borne in triumph from the Tower to Westminster Hall with imposing military honours. It has been said that never since the defeat of the Spanish Armada had there been more glad emotion in the streets of the capital than when he rode in triumph, with the colours he had captured, through its crowded and decorated streets. The way lay through the Green Park, and Queen Anne, well content to stand aside at such an hour, watched its stately progress from the windows of St. James's Palace.

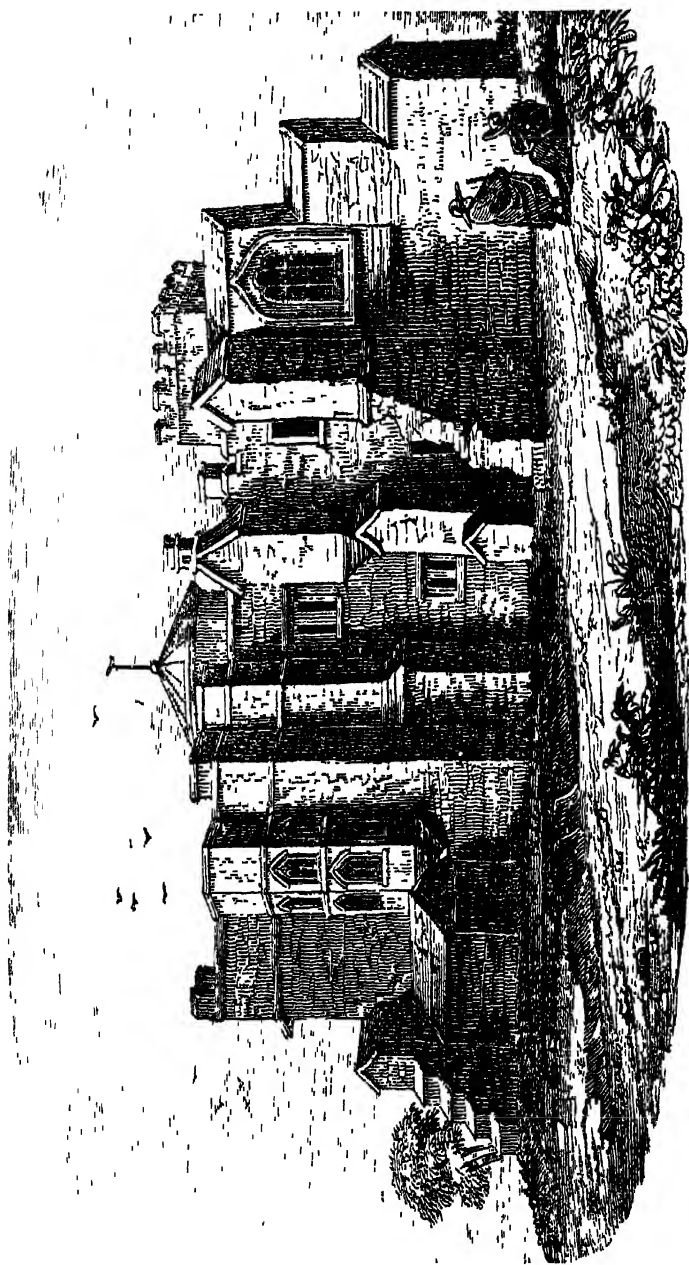
Neither the Queen nor the nation was satisfied with verbal acknowledgments, however ardent, of Marlborough's unmatched services to England. On the 17th of February, Her Majesty, in response to an address from the House of Commons, begging the Throne to devise proper means for perpetuating the memory of the services of the Duke of Marlborough, informed the House that it was her pleasure to bestow on his Grace and his heirs the interest of the Crown in the Manor and Honour of Woodstock, and requested, accordingly, a grant of supply to dispose of the encumbrances on that estate. A Bill for this purpose was at once introduced. It passed through both Houses of Parliament without opposition, and received the royal sanction on the 14th of March. The only stipulation imposed was that the Duke and his heirs should present to the Crown, on each anniversary of the victory, a standard emblazoned with the arms of France. In further token of gratitude, Her Majesty



issued an order to the Board of Works to erect, at the expense of the Crown, a stately palace, which was to be named Blenheim, so that future generations might recall the glorious victory it was designed to commemorate.

Woodstock—the name means a leafy place—had been a royal demesne from time immemorial. Saxon, Norman, Plantagenet, and Tudor Kings came thither, glad to forget the cares of State in the pleasures of the chase. The ancient town grew up at the gates of the Park, and was already in existence when the Domesday Survey was made. The park itself, originally like Cornbury and Wychwood, was a wild and undulating forest, which Henry I. enclosed. He built great walls around it, in order to keep, in the quaint words of John Stow, the antiquary, “great store of deer and divers strange beast, such as were brought to him from far countries, lions, leopards, lynx, and such other.” It was in the reign of Henry II. that Woodstock grew famous. The King often held his Court at the manor-house, which stood within half a mile to the north of the palace which Queen Anne built for Marlborough. He came thither, not merely for the chase, but, as the old chronicles put it, “for the love of a certain woman called Rosamund,” whose bower in the park was hidden in a maze, the clue to which was discovered through the jealousy of Queen Eleanor. Rosamund Clifford, commonly called Fair Rosamund, was the daughter of Walter de Clifford, Baron of Hereford, and was the favourite mistress of Henry II. Traditions differ as to her fate, but the most authentic version of the story states that she finally took sanctuary at Godstow Nunnery, near Oxford, and there died. The supposed site of Fair Rosamund’s Bower has for centuries been identified with the well near the northern end of the bridge which crosses the lake, created, when the Churchills came into possession,





THE ROYAL MANOR HOUSE OF WOODSTOCK.



from the River Glyme, which flowed through the park.

The manor-house was on a knoll a little to the north of the present bridge, and its position is marked by a group of sycamores, though no actual vestige of the building itself remains. It was a considerable house, for, apart from the King's private apartments and the Queen's lodgings, it contained halls of state, a chapel, rooms for the officers of the Court, a guard-chamber, and a gate-house. One King after another appears to have added to it, until Henry VII. completed a range of buildings which, with its courtyards, was nearly an acre in extent. It was in the gate-house that the Princess Elizabeth lived, under the close surveillance of Sir Henry Bedingfield, after Wyatt's rebellion, in the reign of her sister, Mary Tudor. The Princess was allowed to wander through Woodstock Park, but was always closely guarded and it was there that she envied the milkmaids, whose songs she heard on the other side of its walls, and wished she could exchange places with them. Her captivity began in May, 1554, and ended in April, 1555. When she became Queen, Elizabeth did not forget the consideration shown to her by the people of Woodstock, for in the first year of her reign she confirmed the charter of Henry VI., and bestowed certain property on the borough.

James I., with his Court, frequently was in residence at Woodstock Manor, and Charles I., hastening back to Oxford after the Battle of Edgehill, spent a night under its roof. It was garrisoned by the royal troops in the Civil War, and all that remained of Rosamund's Bower was then destroyed, lest, perchance, the Roundheads should shelter there in an attack on the manor-house. It suffered a siege which lasted twenty days during the Civil War, and after the Commonwealth it remained little better than a

picturesque ruin; and it was in this condition when Queen Anne bestowed Woodstock Park, nearly 1,800 acres in extent, together with more than 500 acres of land outside its wall, on John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, and his heirs for ever. There was no precedent in the annals of England for such a munificent act. No servant of the Crown, however illustrious, had ever been honoured, before Marlborough, by the proposal to erect so splendid a public monument of his services to the nation. This, though a unique distinction, carried with it a practical disadvantage. Queen Anne and her Parliament began to build without counting the cost, a circumstance which led, when the attitude of the Throne and nation alike had changed, to serious misunderstandings. Queen Anne always issued the orders for the payment of the work, and as long as she lived these vast charges were included in Her Majesty's debt, as part of the Civil List sanctioned by Parliament. The real difficulty began with vexatious delays, when the Duchess had been driven from Court by the political intrigues of Harley and Mrs. Masham, and it was complicated by the ill-defined stipulations at the start, and culminated when the hostility of the Duchess to the architect assumed the nature of an open quarrel.

Horace Walpole always expressed surprise that Vanbrugh, whom Swift mockingly described as Vitruvius the Second, was chosen for so great a task. Sir Christopher Wren was unquestionably the greatest architect of the age, and he submitted plans for the proposed building; but Wren's designs were set aside in favour of those of Vanbrugh, possibly because that strong, versatile personage was Controller of the Works to Queen Anne, and held the decorative appointment also of Clarenceux King-at-Arms. Walpole tells us that, though the Court was partial to Vanbrugh,

other people were not blind to his defects. He was a confident, witty, ambitious, wheedling fellow, who thought himself equally competent to manage a theatre, write a play, or build a palace. He was Captain Vanbrugh when he comes upon the scene in 1705, and, though he had seen no fighting, he could dangle a sword with the best, and make elaborate compliments to the Duchess on the military achievements of her husband. He quickly won her confidence, and for a time she treated him with marked consideration, feeling, perhaps, all the more impressed by him because of the romance which attached to the fact that he once was a prisoner in the Bastille, which to her was a symbol of all that was detestable in France.

Vanbrugh, to do him justice, had a genuine admiration for Marlborough, and even when he was at daggers drawn with the Duchess it never slackened. It was the admiration of a *poseur* and a carpet knight for a soldier, not prodigal of words, like himself, but supreme in action. The Duke seems to have treated him with mingled amusement and caution. He laughed good-humouredly at his homage, and scanned closely his accounts. Vanbrugh was the first knight created by George I., which was not surprising, since, in his capacity of Clarenceux Herald, he had carried the Garter to that Sovereign when Anne conferred that distinction upon him as Prince of Hanover in 1706, when Blenheim was building. If any proof were needed of the Duke's good nature, it is to be found in the fact that, in spite of the bitter feud between the Duchess and the architect of Blenheim, which was at its height when George I. came to the throne, he brushed the matter aside, and presented Vanbrugh to the King for the audience which sent him forth into the world as Sir John—the name by which he is known to-day. He was of Dutch descent;

perhaps that had something to do with his parade of devotion to the man who championed the imperilled liberties of Holland.

Vanbrugh was a student of Palladio, and was enamoured of the stately Italian school of architecture. He had received, at best, only a fitful and almost haphazard training for a profession which he did not adopt until he had played many other parts. Yet he built Castle Howard and Blenheim, and as long as they stand his claims as an architect can never be ignored. The imagination which yielded him renown as a dramatist did not desert him when the medium in which he worked was marble and stone. He was a perfect exponent of the massive, the stately, the imposing, the spectacular appeal of architecture. He borrowed with both hands from classic models, and in building Blenheim kept avowedly before him the creation of a splendid national monument, rather than the subtle charm of a noble dwelling. He had genius, but scarcely that form of it which has been defined as an infinite capacity for taking pains.

Voltaire, who visited the Duchess at Blenheim some years after Marlborough's death, declared that apparently the last thought that Vanbrugh had considered was the question of comfort. Everything, he held, had been sacrificed to effect and what he termed the Majesty of Size.

The Duchess always protested that she never liked Vanbrugh's design for Blenheim. She thought that the scheme of the house was too ambitious; she did not wish to live in a great rambling building which covers more than three acres. But her objections were overruled by the Duke and Lord Godolphin. They both agreed with Vanbrugh that, if the palace was to be an historic national memorial of the crowning victory after which it was called, it could scarcely be either too splendid or too spacious, and in this view



the Queen herself concurred. Here it is possible to cite, from an unprinted document, the Duchess's comments on the place:

"Every friend of mine knows that I was always against building at such an expense, and as long as I meddled with it at all I took as much pains to lessen the charge every day, as if it had to be paid for out of the fortune that was to provide for my own children, for I always thought it too great a sum even for the Queen to pay. . . . I never liked any building so much for the show and vanity, as for its usefulness and convenience, and therefore I was always against the whole design of Blenheim as too big and unwieldy, whether I considered the pleasure of living in it, or the good of my family that were to enjoy it hereafter."<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess adds that she felt that a building on such a scale would of necessity take a long time to finish, and that, in consequence, the Duke, "when it was reasonable for him to lose no time," would be kept out of its enjoyment.

The Duke was marching at the head of his army from the Moselle to the Netherlands, to the relief of Overkirk, when the building of Blenheim began, in June, 1705. There was an absolute panic in Holland at the moment, for the French, under Villeroy, had captured Huy and invested Liége, and were clearly intent on recovering all their lost ground of the Meuse. Marlborough had no time to think of any personal affairs at the moment, for the military situation had suddenly grown critical. Meanwhile, Vanbrugh, on the 9th of June, received an official letter from Lord Godolphin, constituting him "Surveyor of the Works and Buildings intended to be erected at Woodstock," and giving him "full power" to purchase materials and employ workpeople for the said buildings. He lost no time, for the foundation-stone was laid on the

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

18th of June, with considerable ceremony and amid local rejoicings. It was placed on the east front of the palace, under the bow-windowed room in the private apartments. This room seems to have been specially introduced into the plan by Her Grace, for Vanbrugh refers to it particularly, even before the palace was built, as "my lady Duchess' favourite bow-window." It is almost the only room in the building which is closely associated in tradition with her memory, and it was there that Steele's "Conscious Lovers," and other plays which beguiled the last days of the Duke, were performed by his grandchildren and his guests.

Vanbrugh wrote to the Duke on the 22nd of June, stating that the "first stone of Blenheim was laid on Monday last with much ado." He added that he had opened four or five quarries in the park, and found stone for the interior of the walls, but very little of a better quality. Some of the external stone for Blenheim was taken from one small quarry within the park, and all of it was obtained within a radius of a few miles of Woodstock. A great deal of it was excavated at Cornbury, five miles away. Lord Rochester refused to accept any payment, since it was to be used for the house of the Duke of Marlborough; otherwise the cost of the palace would have been greatly increased. Vanbrugh in this letter indicates that the plans of the house had been modified since the Duke had gone abroad:

"The drawings I sent Your Grace were not perfect in little particulars, which at leisure have since been more thoroughly considered. The only alteration worth mentioning to Your Grace, however, is in the first entrance of the House, where, by bringing the break forwarder, the Hall is enlarged, and, from a round is brought to an oval figure, a Portico added, and yet the room much better lighted than before. The top of it rises above the rest of the building

regularly in the middle of the four great Pavilions. I hope Your Grace will like this alteration, for I think it adds wonderfully to the beauty, regularity, and magnificence of the building. Your Grace will believe the work in general will now go on very roundly when I acquaint you that the number of workmen on the House—besides the Gardens—will in a few days rise to near a thousand. I shall be very happy if my endeavours in this, and my wishes for Your Grace's success abroad, are answered."<sup>1</sup>

The Emperor Leopold I. bestowed the principality of Mindelheim upon the Duke after the battle which saved the Imperial throne. Marlborough's reason for accepting this bit of German territory was not the £2,000 a year which it brought him, and which by this time he did not need, but the circumstance that it made him a Prince of the Empire, and therefore placed him on an equality with the jealous minor potentates who had shown a disposition to resent his authority in the field. He was deprived of Mindelheim by the Treaty of Rastadt in 1714, which restored the principality to Bavaria. It gave him, however, as long as the War of the Spanish Succession lasted, the authority he needed, and when he was deprived of it he had grown careless of such honours, and was too proud to press his claims. In 1715, however, by way of tardy compensation, he was made Prince of Nellenburg. By that time Marlborough had no illusions about public gratitude at home or abroad. But between the years 1705 and 1711 his heart was set on the splendid palace of Blenheim, which was then slowly rising in the great park at Woodstock. There are constant allusions to the progress of the building in the letters which he wrote in campaigns, crowned by the victories of Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet. He continually asks the Duchess for details as to the progress of the building, and again

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

and again, in the midst of his strenuous career abroad, he expresses the longing for peace and quietness with her under the roof of the house, which stands to-day as an enduring memorial of his unmatched genius as a soldier.

Towards the close of his military career, a note, not of impatience, but of misgiving, creeps into his letters. It seems as if he had realized that the scale of the building was so vast, and the difficulties that arose were so vexatious, that life itself would be ended before he knew the pride of possession. Happily, his fears were not realized—he was master of Blenheim for a few shadowed years; but in 1722, when he fought his last battle—the only one in which he was not conqueror—the palace was still only partially completed.

The general plan of Blenheim—it is impossible to describe architectural details—is a vast central building connected by colonnades with two projecting quadrangular wings. The south façade, though less ornate and ambitious in design, has always been admired for its simple and massive dignity. At the east and west end of it the building projects, and is crowned by square towers; whilst the centre, also projecting, is rendered imposing by pillars, rising to the height of the building, which mask the entrance from the grand salon to the park, approached by a broad flight of stone steps. The pediment is crowned by a colossal bust of Louis XIV., a trophy taken from the gates of Tournay. The original intention was to place on this commanding position an equestrian statue of the Duke. Although the skyline of the south front of the palace is less broken and picturesque than that of the north façade, its beauty is undeniable. The east front, the earliest part of the building, contains the private apartments, and is relieved by the bold sweep of the bay-windowed parlour, perhaps the only room in the palace which is definitely associated

with the Duchess. The noble room, with three windows on the east façade and three on the south, is the Grand Cabinet, which Marlborough specially liked, and is still adorned with the great mirrors which he brought for his walls from abroad. The west façade is of similar design to the east, and contains the Long Library, which was at first meant for a picture-gallery and ballroom, and still ranks as one of the finest apartments in Europe.

There are two central courts in the main building, and from the north end of the library access is gained to the raised colonnade, which leads to the private chapel, containing a magnificent marble monument to the first Duke, who rests in the vault beneath, side by side with the woman he loved. Beyond, again, on that side of the palace, through an arched gateway, are the riding-school and stables; whilst at the other extremity of the palace, behind the imposing clock-tower, is the outer court, which contains the orangery, the estate offices, the dairy, and servants' quarters. This court is reached on the side nearest Woodstock by a massive tower, enriched with military ornaments, which, with its iron gates, forms the main entrance to the palace, and contains the porter's lodge. Beyond stretches that portion of the park which divides the palace from the town of Woodstock, and where the street ends stands the first entrance of Blenheim, a stately classical arch, with side-entrances for pedestrians, erected in 1723 by the Duchess, and bearing an inscription stating that it was built the year after the death of the "most illustrious John, Duke of Marlborough, by order of Sarah his most beloved wife." It adds that "the services of this great man to his country the pillar will tell you, which the Duchess has erected as a lasting monument to his glory and her affection to him." The "pillar" in question is the monument which the Duchess built

on an eminence in the park, fronting the north façade at the distance of about a mile. It rises to a height of 130 feet, and is a landmark for miles around. The pedestal, which is cased with white marble, is inscribed with a record, written by Lord Bolingbroke, of the victories of the great soldier, together with a summary of the Acts of Parliament granting the Manor of Woodstock to the Churchills. The column is surmounted by a statue of the Duke in Roman costume. The inscription on the monument is, in truth, the splendid summary of the Duke's achievements. It describes the long succession of his victories, from Blenheim to Bouchain, in battles which "broke the power of France, rescued the Empire from desolation, asserted and confirmed the Liberties of Europe." The statement ends with the proud words:

"The Acts of Parliament inscribed on this Pillar shall stand as long as the British Name and Language last, illustrious monuments of Marlborough's Glory and of Britain's Gratitude."

The nation's gratitude was short-lived, but Marlborough's glory, though it suffered passing eclipse, shines like a fixed star in the firmament for ever

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PROUDEST YEAR IN THE DUCHESS'S LIFE

THE Duchess was elated in 1705. Homage from all parts of Europe reached her, as the wife of the soldier who at Blenheim had delivered a crushing blow to the military prestige of France. Her power at the Court of St. James's was unbounded. The Queen and the nation vied with each other in doing honour to the Duke. The palace, to commemorate the great battle which had altered the whole course of the War of the Spanish Succession, and had compelled the invaders of other kingdoms to be content with the defence of their own frontiers, was already beginning to rise in the historic park at Woodstock. There were political and social reasons of another kind which heightened her triumph. The Whigs, to whom she pinned her faith, came back to Westminster from the polls with a majority. She was already beginning to urge, not wisely but too well, that her son-in-law, Lord Sunderland, should be raised to Cabinet rank, a proposal to which the Queen, who was alarmed by his extravagant speeches, demurred. The Duchess was not easily turned from anything on which she had set her heart, and in the following year she prevailed. Meanwhile, Sunderland had been sent as special Envoy to Vienna, to congratulate the Emperor Joseph I. on his accession to the imperial throne, in succession to Leopold I., who died on the 6th of May, 1705. Lord Sunderland was naturally received at Vienna with marked distinction, as the representative

of Queen Anne, and as the son-in-law of Marlborough. His selection for that high post gratified the Duchess, and all the more because it kept him in the public eye, and removed him from the political intrigues of the Court at a time when the Queen's objections to the dismissal of Sir Charles Hedges from the post of Secretary of State, in order to make way for Sunderland, still prevailed.

The Duchess even in old age was a matchmaker, as her granddaughters had reason to know, and in 1705 she arranged an alliance for the last of her own children, who at that time remained unmarried. Lady Mary Churchill was a high-spirited, vivacious, and singularly beautiful girl, so much so, indeed, that in the year after Blenheim she was a reigning toast, and her loveliness was the talk of the town. The Earl of Peterborough's heir had sought her hand, which the Duke peremptorily refused because of his evil reputation. Lord Huntington, son of the Earl of Cromartie, was another of Lady Mary's suitors, but, apparently, in this case the girl herself was coy. Lord Tullibardine was also one of her countless admirers, but his proposal was rejected. Then, when she was still only sixteen, Viscount Monthermer, son of Ralph, Earl of Montagu, made advances; but Lady Mary pleaded her youth, and kept him in suspense for a year. They were married in the spring of 1705, greatly to the delight of the Duchess, and with the approval of the Duke, who seems to have thought that such an alliance would be of service in the rivalry between the Whigs and the Tories. The Queen made the same provision as in the case of the Duke's other daughters, and her father gave Lady Mary the same marriage portion as her sisters. Lady Mary has the distinction of being the only daughter of Marlborough to whom frequent allusion is made in his letters from abroad. He was proud



of her wit, as well as of her beauty. She was the only child who survived both her parents. It was, perhaps, as well for her own happiness that she escaped from leading-strings early, for she was almost as independent and outspoken as her mother, and their strong natures clashed. Her father-in-law, through Marlborough's influence, was created Duke of Montagu shortly after the marriage of his son.

Montagu's career was stormy and dramatic. He was twice sent by Charles II. as Ambassador to Louis XIV., incurred the mortal antipathy of the Duchess of Cleveland, was struck off the Privy Council, and superseded at Versailles ! He afterwards espoused the cause of Monmouth, and was compelled to go into exile. He returned to England in the reign of James II., and gained his earldom from William III., with whom he had thrown in his lot at the Revolution. He died in the year that Marlborough triumphed at Malplaquet and Lady Monthermer, at the age of twenty-one became Duchess of Montagu, somewhat to the dismay of her imperious mother, whose star at that time was beginning to set.

The Duchess was forty-five when the youngest of her daughters was married, and it is quite clear that she was glad when they were off her hands. She had no longer to chaperon them at the opera and the ballroom, and was thankful to be relieved of the task of keeping undesirable young gallants at arm's length. One of the least attractive aspects of her character is thrown into relief by her relations with her daughters. Her letters in the Blenheim archives are too long and often too trivial to be given at length. It is enough to sum up in a few words the broad impression which they give. There is a rap on the knuckles in many of them. She was continually bringing railing accusations of incivility, disrespect, and ingratitude, against the oldest and

the youngest of them—Lady Godolphin and the Duchess of Montagu. No one, not even her mother, could pick a quarrel with Lady Sunderland, for “the Little Whig,” as men called her, was the soul of goodness, and eager at all times to make peace among her relatives. As for the Countess of Bridgewater, a sunny temperament and a sense of humour marked her, and she shared also, more than any other of the Duke’s children, one of his most enviable characteristics—the capacity for patience. The truth is that the Duchess of Marlborough was curiously autocratic in the attitude she assumed to her daughters. Even when they were married women, of high and independent rank, she expected them to display in her presence a deference which, even in those days of ceremony and etiquette, was unusual. She expected them to drop a curtsy as they entered her room, and to address her as Madam. She ignored the circumstance that they were no longer children, and had their own place at Court and in Society; and the consequence was that two of them, Lady Godolphin and the Duchess of Montagu, grew defiant and went their own way.

There were faults on both sides, as will appear; meanwhile it is enough to cite, from an unprinted paper, one of the charges of disrespect which the Duchess made against her youngest daughter at this particular period:

“One of Lady Mary’s fancies was when she was first married, that if she met me in any visit or publick place, she would not make me a curtsy—I suppose that must proceed from her fears that I would not make her a very low one, and at that time I was reduced to desire nothing more than decency—but that not being to be compassed, I desired her to give me the ease of not coming to my house—and in this way we lived a gt. while, and when I have met her in the streete in her chair she would not let down her

glass and bow. After this had made some noise, several people that were friends to ye family took upon them to argue this matter with her, and she was so far persuaded, that we were made friends, which I was very much pleased with. But her nature soon returned, and when the Duke of Marlborough and I went abroad in 1712—she very seldome writ to me, and upon my reproaching her and complaining to her sisters of her want of kindness, she writ very odd letters—upon which her father writ a very moving letter to the present Earl of Godolphin—desiring him who was so reasonable a man to convince the Duchess of Montagu how much she was in the wrong, not to live kindly with so good a mother.”<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess as a “good mother,” in the light of her stern and uneasy relations with her daughters, provokes a smile. She used to say of herself, with the candour, right or wrong, which always marked her, that it was her habit to “tumble her mind out on paper;”<sup>2</sup> and, if she was to be judged by the reckless words she wrote concerning Lady Godolphin and the Duchess of Montagu in her lonely old age, truth would compel the use of an epithet of an opposite kind. Like the majority of quick-tempered, impulsive, outspoken people, her bark was worse than her bite, and therefore it is necessary to set over against her unbridled speech her many fine and redeeming qualities.

Harley, anxious to gain the Queen’s confidence, and St. John, whose footing at Court was still uneasy, were dancing attendance on the Duchess in 1705, and trying to wheedle her by adroit compliments and the gossip of the town into complaisance. She liked St. John at this time fairly well, and was quick enough to recognize his shining gifts and unbounded admiration for the Duke. But the Duchess thought that she detected insincerity in Harley, though he far outdid St. John in protestations of devotion. She

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

disliked his ceremonial bows, his high-flown, studied speeches, his ostentatious air of candour, with the result that the more effusive he became the less she trusted him. She believed that the Duke's confidence in him was misplaced, and her aversion was heightened by her knowledge that he supported Sir Charles Hedges, who stood in the way of Sunderland's promotion to Cabinet rank.

The Duchess, relieved of the care of her daughters, and deeming herself perfectly secure in the affection and confidence of the Queen, began to absent herself, when the mood seized her, from attendance at Court. The quietude of Windsor Lodge, the beauty of her own garden at Holywell House, and the new interest which had come into her life with the building of Blenheim, in turn attracted her. She wanted more personal liberty, and began to detest the throng of courtiers and suitors, to whose petitions she was forced to attend, when at Kensington or St. James's. But the Duchess failed to realize that she had accustomed the Queen to close attention and constant raillery. Mrs. Morley grew moody and depressed, and, in her secret heart, resentful at Mrs. Freeman's preference for any place outside the royal closet. But this was hidden from the Duchess in 1705, and she seems to have flattered herself that all was well. It looked like it, what with the brilliant marriage of her daughter, the building of the palace, the political advancement of Sunderland, and the brightening prospects of the Whigs, but appearances are proverbially deceptive.

If the Duchess was elated, the Duke's mood was depressed. He had returned to the war with high hopes, but, through no fault of his own, his plans had miscarried. His intention was to take the offensive by the invasion of Lorraine, for his ambition was to get within striking distance of Paris. Prince Eugene was no longer at his side; he had been recalled to

carry on the war in Italy, where he was confronted by the Duc de Vendôme. Marlborough wished to invade France by way of the Moselle and Saar. He thought he could capture Metz, and by that means turn the fortresses of the Netherlands and cut off Alsace. He hastened to his headquarters at Trèves, where the Imperial Allies were to meet him, to carry out the proposed plan of campaign arranged in the previous autumn, and arrived on May 26 in that city. But much had happened in the interval. Vienna was no longer in peril, and the Emperor Leopold I., whose throne had been saved by the Battle of Blenheim, was no longer alive. The Duke had expected to find himself at the head of an army of 30,000 British and a reinforcement of 50,000 German troops. Yet, in spite of the pledges he had received, not a man or a horse from the German Princes and States came to his aid. He waited at Trèves until the 17th of June, with the knowledge that Louis XIV. was assembling a great army under Villeroy in the Low Countries, and that Villars and Marsin already held strong positions along the line of his proposed advance. Faced by overwhelming odds, the Duke broke up his camp at the end of three anxious weeks, and fell back to the Meuse, having lost, as he said himself, "one of the fairest opportunities in the world by the faithlessness of his allies."

The Duke's letters written at this period make it plain that he was not merely greatly disappointed by the failure of the Allies to come to his aid, but that he was ill. Prince Lewis of Baden, to make matters worse, instead of hastening to Trèves, made a pretext of his health, and went off to take the waters at one of the German spas. He wrote to tell the Duke that, in consequence, his troops would not march at the time proposed, and, as every day was critical, Marlborough did well to be angry:

"This and other things makes me wish myself a much privater man than I am, so that I might depend upon myself without being plagued with other people's humours."<sup>1</sup>

He told Godolphin, in a letter written in the middle of June, that he was weary of his life, and declared that, if the suspense lasted much longer, it would make an end of him. He could not sleep.

"My dearest soul," he writes to the Duchess, "pity me and love. I own to you that my sickness comes from fretting, for I have been disappointed in everything that was promised me. I have had letters from all the children, but till I am in a better humour I cannot write to them, so be so good as to say something to them very kind from me."<sup>2</sup>

He tells her that the only consolation he has is that she is kinder to him than she has been for many years. He compares himself to a sick man turning restlessly on his bed from side to side. He urges her to press forward the house at Woodstock, for he thinks that he will never stir abroad again, when this campaign is ended, from his own home, since "it is impossible to serve with any satisfaction when it is in so many people's power to do mischief."<sup>3</sup>

Marlborough was at no period of his life suspicious; he trusted men implicitly until he had good reason to know that they were unworthy of his confidence. The Duchess, on the contrary, was always reading motives into other people's conduct. She was sometimes right, but quite as often she was wrong, and the uneasy habit grew upon her as life advanced. Even in 1705 she believed the Duke and Godolphin were ill-advised in placing so much trust in Harley and St. John. The events which happened a few years later prove that she was right; but whether

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

either of them would have plotted against Marlborough in the manner in which they eventually did, if she herself had proved less overbearing and more considerate, is one of the unsolved riddles of history. However that may be, it was peculiarly unfortunate that in the early summer of 1705, when, if ever she ought to have written cheerfully to her husband, since his mind was distracted by difficulties of all sorts, she kept telling him that one of the Ministers who had been recently introduced into Godolphin's Cabinet was plotting against him.

There are people who catch at a straw in the direction of hope. The Duchess had another and less excellent way: she caught at a straw in the direction of apprehension; and the pity was that she never spared the Duke her moody fears. He tells her, in reply to a letter alive with political misgivings, that, though others may intrigue against him, he is careless of the result:

"I serve the Queen with all my heart, and when they can prevail with her to think I am no use I shall retire well contented, for I long after nothing so much as to live quietly with you. When I have no place I shall then have the pleasure of letting the Queen and all the world see that I shall serve with the same zeal without a place as now that I have her favour."<sup>1</sup>

He adds that he thinks that it is for the good of England that neither party in the State should have a great majority, so that the Crown may be able to influence its affairs. In another letter, written from Maestricht, the 29th of June, 1705, he declares that he begins to see clearly that "negligence abroad and the mallice of parties at home will make me incapable of doing Her Majesty any service." He adds:

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

"I shall be obliged to continue as I am. My days must be very short, as I am wasted to nothing, having perpetual vexation—fearing the world may blame me for other people's faults."<sup>1</sup>

Whilst Marlborough was awaiting the reinforcements which never arrived at Trèves, Villeroy captured in quick succession both Huy and Liége, and the Dutch in a panic begged the Duke to bring his army with all haste to the Meuse. If he had followed his own inclination, he would have marched in an opposite direction, and have joined Prince Eugene in Italy. He detested meddlesome Dutch Field Deputies, and was angry with the States-General because they had not sent to Trèves the ammunition they had promised. Prince Eugene shared Marlborough's disdain of the Dutch Deputies. He exclaimed: "*Se mêlant toujours de tout, et toujours mourant de peur.*"<sup>2</sup> He saw, however, that Villeroy, emboldened by his absence, might carry all before him in the Netherlands, for Overkirk was no match for so experienced a soldier. Hence, with a heavy heart and in ill-health, he despatched the Foot from Trèves on the 19th of June, and himself followed the next day with the Horse:

"The alarm is so great in Holland that I am apprehensive they may be frightened so as to harken to a proposition of peace before I get thither, so that I make all the diligence possible."<sup>3</sup>

No wonder he was chagrined at the turn of events. He believed that if he had been properly supported he could have invaded France, pushed his army on to Paris, and put an end to the war. "There was all the probability imaginable," he exclaimed, "for a glorious campaign," and it had been put to flight

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene's Memoires, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Blenheim Papers.



by the "negligence of Princes," who had broken their promises by not coming to his aid at the critical moment. When he was on the march, a letter was put into his hand from the Queen, dated, "Windsor, June 12." It was so gracious that it changed his mood. Her Majesty told him that she was extremely sorry to learn that he had met with so much vexation and uneasiness. She added that, whatever fortune attended him, she felt persuaded that nothing would be wanting on his part. She declared that she was persuaded that before the campaign ended something would happen to "make you very well satisfied with yourself," and then she added:

"I pray God send you good success, make you easy in everything, and continue you under His gracious protection, that your friends may have the satisfaction of seeing you in England again in health, which nobody I am sure will desire more sincerely than your humble servant,

"ANNE R."<sup>1</sup>

It was just the message Marlborough needed at that moment. He assured the Queen in reply that he would venture ten thousand lives, if he had them, to make Her Majesty easy and happy. At the same time he hinted to the Queen that it might be to her advantage, as well as his own, if he resigned his command at the close of the present campaign, since he was between cross-fires in England. Yet he hesitated because he was unwilling to place the Crown at the mercy of either political party.

The Queen's prediction that something memorable would happen before the campaign ended was fulfilled within a month of the period when she wrote her letter. Huy was recaptured and the siege of Liége was raised, and Villeroy, with his great army, retired behind the fortified lines, which

Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. 1., p. 287.

stretched across the Spanish Netherlands from Antwerp to Namur. These lines were protected by the cordon of fortresses constructed, as an almost impregnable barrier, by the genius of Vauban, the greatest military engineer, not merely of France, but of Europe. Villeroy's army, 70,000 strong, held the lines, which had been strengthened and extended during the previous three years. The Duke by marches and counter-marches, threw the French completely off their guard, and under cover of the darkness forced the lines at Tirlemont on the 18th of July. It was one of the greatest military achievements, even in Marlborough's career, and only a consummate soldier would have ventured to attempt it, especially with a force inferior to an army which lay behind entrenchments. The Dutch Deputies were aghast at his proposal, and some of their commanders, notably Slangenberg, thought that the Duke was simply courting destruction; but, in concert with Overkirk, he carried his point, and the result was a brilliant and almost bloodless victory. His loss was eighty men, but he captured several officers of distinction, a number of standards, and 1,200 of the rank and file.

"TIRLEMONT,  
"July 18th, 1705.

"MY DEAREST SOULL,

"This bearer Durel (one of the aides de camp) will acquaint you with the blessing God has been pleas'd to give me, for I have this morning forced the enemy's lins and beaten a good part of their Army, taken the canon, two Lt. Generals and two Major Generals, and a great many officers, besides standards and coullors, of all which I shall have a perfect account tomorrow. It is impossible to say too much good of the troupes that were with me, for never men fought better. Having march'd al last night, and taken a good deal of pains this day that my blood is so hote that I can hardly hold my pen, so that you will, dearest life, excuse mee. If I say no more but that

I wou'd not let you know my designe of attacking the lyns by the last post fearing it might give you uneasyness, and now, my dearest soul, my heart is so full of joye for this good success, that shou'd I write more, I shou'd say a great many follys."<sup>1</sup>

The Duke had a narrow escape at Tirlemont. The Horse charged the enemy sword in hand. They fired from their saddles, and galloped back hotly pursued. Presently they received reinforcements, and made a counter-charge, before which, for the moment, the British recoiled. In the confusion, Marlborough, with a trumpeter and a groom, was separated from his troops. A French dragoon, seeing the chance of dealing a mortal blow at Marlborough, rushed at him. Rising in the saddle, to make the thrust of his sword more effectual, he overbalanced himself, and, falling to the ground, was seized by the trumpeter. Just in the nick of time Marlborough's thirty-eight squadrons rallied, and the Duke led them forward, again scattering the enemy like chaff, and capturing the guns. Villeroy was not present at the action, but tidings of it quickly reached him. He realized that his position had been turned, and he fell back on Louvain. The Duke made two distinct attempts to follow up his success, but in both instances his designs were foiled by the vacillation and stupidity of the Dutch. So he had to content himself by destroying the French lines from the Derner to the Mehaigne.<sup>2</sup> Slangenberg was the chief offender amongst the Dutch generals, and so great was the indignation, both in England and Holland, when the facts were disclosed, that he was deprived of his command. Marlborough would have struck a decisive blow in 1705 if timid counsels and quarrelsome tempers had not prevailed in the Dutch camp.

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> See "History of the British Army," by the Hon. J. W. Fortescue, for detailed military descriptions, with plans of Marlborough's campaigns. London, 1899.

The tidings of the forcing of the lines at Tirlemont were received with great rejoicings at the English Court. Harley told the Queen that no Prince in the world had such a subject as the Duke of Marlborough. He was effusive in his compliments to the great soldier, whose downfall he afterwards accomplished:

"Your friends and servants here cannot be without concern on your Grace's account when we hear how much you expose that precious life of yours upon all occasions. . . . I hope your Lordship's unwearied care and unparalleled merit will in due time procure a lasting and sure peace for Europe with repose and eternal renown to your Grace."<sup>1</sup>

The Duke was beginning to understand the man, and could afford to toss such a letter aside.

Thanks to Slangenberg and the Dutch Deputies, Villeroy had escaped for the moment, but in the next campaign Marlborough tried conclusions with him to some purpose. He had visited Vienna in the interval, where he was received with the honours of conqueror, and came to a clear understanding with Joseph I. He returned to The Hague early in the year 1706, and from that city wrote to the Duchess, in reply to a letter of complaint which she had sent him about the conduct of her daughters. It is clear that he was troubled at the manner in which small faults were reported to him, and begged his wife, for his sake, to have in mind that her children were young. He asked her not to regard trivial misdemeanours too seriously, and hinted that when he could find time to write to them he would point out to them the duty of being more considerate to "so good a mother."<sup>2</sup> He adds that he is sending 10,000 men to Prince Eugene, in order that he may take the field. The letter ends with the familiar request for tidings as to how the building at Woodstock was progressing.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Marlborough might have said what Nelson said a century later: "I hate your pen-and-ink men." Grub Street scribblers were already beginning to think him noble quarry, and to stab at his reputation. The hue and cry against him had not yet arisen, and writers of genius, like Swift, who afterwards used all their powers of detraction, were still silent. The Duchess, however, was shrewd enough to detect the first mutterings of the storm when she sent him printed tirades and compliments with an impartial hand. He had received what he called a "scandalous pamphlet," and his comment was characteristic, since it reveals his attitude to the Press:

"The best way of putting an end to that villainy is not to appear concerned. The best of men and women have in all ages been abused; if we can be so happy as to behave ourselves, as to have no reason to reproach ourselves, we may then despise what rage and faction do."

He adds:

"If I must be used ill by those I endeavour to serve with the hazard of my life, and that the enemy would seek all means of destroying me, I must be madder than anybody in Bedlam, if I shall continue serving."<sup>1</sup>

This is practically what he had said to Godolphin at an earlier stage of the campaign.

The Duke sometimes struck out passages complimentary to himself, which his secretary, Cardonnel, who was with him all through his campaigns, wrote for the official *Gazette*.

"I am persuaded," he used to say, "that an honest man must be justified by his own actions, and not by the pen of a writer, though he should 'be a zealous friend.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

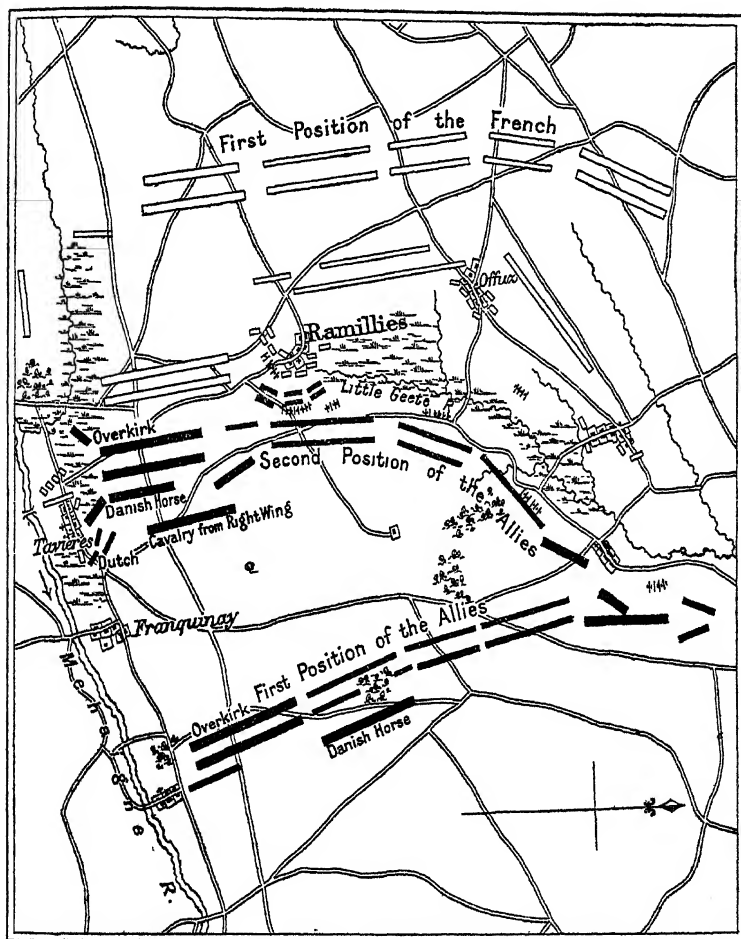
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

That may seem a small thing, but it at least throws a significant sidelight on the quality, as well as the character, of Marlborough.

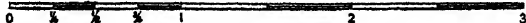
It was on the 23rd of May, 1706, that the Duke won the second of his great victories in the War of the Spanish Succession. Villeroy received orders from Versailles at the beginning of that month to force a battle. Marlborough was threatening Namur, a place which the French regarded, on strategical grounds, as more important than any other in the Low Countries. Villars had opened the campaign by a successful attack on Prince Lewis of Baden on the Mottar, and the Dutch were in a panic as usual; for they saw that, unless Marlborough defeated Villeroy, the whole outlook of the war would be altered for the worse. The Duke, who had just received the Danish contingent, which brought his army up to 60,000 men, threw himself across the path of Villeroy's advancing army, and the latter took up a commanding position on the heights above Ramillies, a village only a few miles away from Tirlemont. Villeroy's army was 70,000 strong, and contained the picked regiments of France. The French, believing that Marlborough could not possibly reach the point they had so carefully chosen for the battle, were quietly strengthening their position, when in the early hours of the morning General Cadogan, with 600 men, galloped upon the scene to fix the *guidons* for the guidance of the advancing army. Villeroy's right was on the Mehaigne; his centre and left lay behind the marshes of the Geete. Between the Mehaigne and Ramillies, which lay at the edge of the marsh, was a strip of firm ground rather more than a mile in extent. This was the chosen field of battle, and at ten o'clock, when the Duke rode to the front to reconnoitre through the rolling mists of that historic May morning, he saw that there Villeroy had massed 120 squadrons of

Battle of  
**RAMILLIES**

23<sup>rd</sup> May 1706.



Scale of Miles



cavalry, and that behind them lay the French infantry of the right wing. Villeroy imagined that Marlborough would throw himself against this force, especially as the French left wing, protected by the marshes, held an almost impregnable position. His whole plan of battle was thrown into confusion when from the heights he saw the English army suddenly wheel to the right as if to attack the French left. The movement was made with roll of drums and display of banners.

Villeroy at once weakened his right wing by hurrying forward reinforcements to the threatened left. Marlborough, with ominous courtesy, gave him ample time for this movement, and, when it was completed, suddenly ordered the troops to fall back. He had grasped the advantage of the rising ground, which screened his army at this point of the field; and when all were under cover except the last brigade, he ordered it to wheel round and face the enemy, who imagined that the whole army was behind the hill. The result of his strategy was that five British battalions, standing at attention on the hill, threw the whole of the French left wing out of action. The position of the French behind the marshes made an attack on their part impossible, and the small force which Marlborough had left behind held them at bay all through the day without firing a single shot.

Meanwhile the main body of the Duke's army had made all haste to the extreme right of the French position, whilst the Danish cavalry had galloped round unnoticed to the flank of Villeroy's position, which was in consequence turned. At half-past one in the afternoon the battle was joined. It began with the artillery. Before the smoke had cleared away the Duke ordered the infantry to advance against the French right wing, whilst four Dutch battalions were directed to carry at the point of the bayonet the villages of Franquinay and Tavières,



where the extreme right of the French army was posted. There was stubborn fighting around Tavières, but presently both villages were captured, and this cleared the way for Overkirk with the cavalry. He charged and broke the first French line; but the second not only held its ground, but drove the Dutch before it. At this juncture the Duke himself brought up fresh squadrons of foreign Horse, and turned the tide of battle. Some French dragoons recognized him when the outcome of the fighting was still uncertain, and, rushing out of their ranks, surrounded him, and in the confusion he was unhorsed. It looked for a moment as if he would be made prisoner, but the cavalry instantly rallied, and the position was saved. Whilst he was mounting his horse again, his Equerry, Colonel Bringfield, held the stirrup, and just as the Duke regained the saddle the Colonel reeled to the ground in a cloud of smoke. He had been killed instantly by a cannon-ball which narrowly missed Marlborough. His gallant death is commemorated on the tapestry at Blenheim, and by a monument in Westminster Abbey.

Meanwhile the battle rolled on, and the solid mass of Marlborough's infantry was hurled against Villeroy's centre, which held the village of Ramillies, whilst the Danish Horse, under the Duke of Würtemberg, fell upon the right flank of the French, and the Dutch Guards under Overkirk swept round from Tavières and began an attack on the rear. Villeroy was completely trapped, and, though the French fought gallantly, a simultaneous rush of the cavalry of the Allies from two directions threw the French Horse into confusion, and the Duke, pressing home the charge, won the Battle of Ramillies.

“Ramillies was a typical ‘encounter battle,’ in which neither commander had time for a prolonged reconnaissance, and the promptitude with which Marlborough made his plans, and the skill with which he

took advantage of his opponent's mistakes, stamped him as a leader of high ability."<sup>1</sup>

Saint-Simon in his "Memoirs" states: "We lost in this battle 4,000 men and many prisoners of rank, all of whom were treated with much politeness by Marlborough." Some of the historic regiments of France were cut to pieces at Ramillies, and in the pursuit which followed the famous Regiment du Roi was either cut down or captured to a man. The French lost the whole of their artillery except six guns. Saint-Simon greatly understates the loss of men. The losses of the French and Bavarians between them in killed, wounded, prisoners, and deserters, were shown to be from 12,000 to 15,000. The Allies lost in killed and wounded 3,600. Brussels surrendered four days after the battle, and, in quick succession, Ghent, Antwerp, and, as the result of a vigorous siege, Ostend, which was regarded as one of the strongest places in Europe; and before the campaign ended Marlborough took Mons, the only place of any account occupied by the French to the north of their own frontier. It has been said that in six weeks after Ramillies not a French soldier remained in a district which up to the day before that battle had been held by an army of 80,000 men, sheltered by a network of the strongest fortifications in the world.

Villeroy ought to have waited for Marsin, who was within two days' march of him when Ramillies was fought. He was recalled, for his defeat had created consternation at Versailles. Three days after the battle (May 27) the Duke wrote to the Duchess:

"I have been in so continued a hurry ever since the battle of Ramillies, by which my blood is so heated that when I go to bed I sleep so unquietly that I cannot get rid of my headache. So as yet I have not all the pleasure I shall enjoy of the blessing God

<sup>1</sup> "An Outline of Marlborough's Campaigns," by Captain F. W. O. Maycock, D.S.O., p. 86. London, 1913.

has been pleased to give us in this great victory. It is most certain that we have destroyed the greatest part of the best troops of France. I have appointed next Sunday for the army to return thanks to God for the protection He has been pleased to give us, for on this occasion it has been very visible. The French had not only greater numbers than we, but also all their best troops. If God had suffered us to be beaten, the liberties of all the Allies had been lost."

He adds significantly that "the consequences of this battle are likelier to be of greater consequences than that of Blenheim."<sup>1</sup> He tells her in another letter of the many towns that had submitted since the victory, and makes it plain that all Brabant was at his feet. It seems to him, he says, more like a dream than the truth, so great are the results of the battle. He expresses his gladness that the Duchess is once more on happy terms with three of her children, and "hopes to God that Lady Monthermer will in time be sensible of the great obligations she has to you." The Duchess had expressed her fear as to his personal safety, little knowing at the moment of his narrow escape at Ramillies. So he writes:

"You are very kind in desiring I should not expose myself. Be assured, my dear soul, I love you so well and am so desirous of ending my days quietly with you, that I shall not venture myself but when it is absolutely necessary. I am sure you are so kind to me and wish so well to the common cause that you would rather see me dead than not do my duty. I am so persuaded that this campaign will bring us a good peace that I beg you to do all you can that the House at Woodstock may be carried up as much as possible that I may have a prospect of living in it."<sup>2</sup>

It would be easy to cite other letters, written during the campaign of 1706, which show by the questions he asked how keen was the interest that the Duke took in the building of Blenheim.

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. i., p. 424.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE FLOWING TIDE OF VICTORY

THERE is no need to describe the rejoicings in England over the Battle of Ramillies. The Queen again went to a service of solemn thanksgiving at St. Paul's, with the Duchess by her side. The Duke received the thanks of both Houses of Parliament for a "victory so great and glorious in its consequences that no age can equal it," and, as an impressive mark of the national gratitude, it was decreed that his title and honours should descend to his daughters and their male heirs, since he had now no son to inherit his renown. It was also determined that the Manor of Woodstock should always follow the title after the death of the Duchess, on whom it had been settled for life. When the Duke returned at the end of the campaign, the colours and standards taken at Ramillies were carried with imposing military honours from Whitehall to Guildhall, amid a scene of indescribable enthusiasm, which was heightened by the fact that the royal standard of France was amongst them, which had been captured in that action by Lord John Hay, of the Scots Greys. But if England rejoiced, France was wellnigh in despair. Voltaire has put the position tersely:

"The Battle of Blenheim had cost Louis one of the finest armies, with all the country betwixt the Danube and the Rhine. It had cost the House of Bavaria all its dominions. By the defeat of Ramillies all Flanders was lost, even to the gates of Lille."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire, "Age of Lewis XIV.," vol. i., p. 357.

Marshal Villeroy was so stunned by his defeat that for five days he did not send any despatch to Versailles, but rested moodily in his tent. When the tidings of defeat arrived, France was filled with consternation to the verge of panic.

Louis XIV. was a man of indomitable will and of high pride, yet even he quailed before the storm. He had pinned his faith to Tallard, to Marsin, to Villars, and to Villeroy, and he was bitterly chagrined that none of them had been able to turn the tide of Marlborough's military triumphs. When Villeroy, old and crestfallen, appeared at Versailles in response to a peremptory summons after Ramillies, the King's mood so far relaxed that he exclaimed, with a bitter smile—Louis was approaching seventy, and Villeroy was sixty-two: "Monsieur le Maréchal, the times are not favourable to us now."<sup>1</sup>

Taxation was growing oppressive in France, and men as well as money were beginning to fail. Louis XIV. in consequence made overtures of peace, but the terms offered him by the Allies were harsh. They meant, in short, that he should take steps to bring about the abdication of his grandson, Philip V. of Spain. This was regarded in France as such an intolerable demand as to lead, at all hazards, to a continuance of the War of the Spanish Succession. In England, also, where a growing number of people were beginning to shake their heads at the cost in blood and treasure of Marlborough's campaigns, it gave point to the charge, which his enemies were already asserting in pamphlets and lampoons, that the Duke was persisting in hostilities for his own advantage. It was a base and unworthy accusation, for the letters of the Duke to the Queen and Godolphin, as well as to the Duchess, show conclusively that his one desire, next to the honour of

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire, "Age of Lewis XIV.," vol. i., p. 348.

England, was to lay down his arms. Louis XIV. had still one illustrious soldier who had not proved impotent nor suffered defeat, and so, in the cruel dilemma to which France was reduced, the Duc de Vendôme, who had held at bay the Allies in Italy, was summoned to succeed Villeroy in the Netherlands. Vendôme was the most capable soldier in France, and no better choice could have been made if the war had to be continued; but even he was no match for Marlborough, as the events of 1707-08 proved.

All through the campaign of 1707, Vendôme, though the army had been reinforced, acting under instructions from Versailles, was wary. He was told to hold Marlborough in check, and for the present not to risk a battle. The summer of that year was singularly inclement, the movement of troops, especially of artillery, was in consequence difficult, and the season when hostilities on the broad scale were possible waned away almost barren of results. The Dutch were once more beginning to clamour for peace, and the Field Deputies, who croaked like frogs, alarmed by the Duke of Berwick's victory that year at Almanza over the Marquess of Galway, were, as usual, predicting disaster to the common cause in the Netherlands. Marlborough again and again attempted to draw the French into action, and with this intent shifted his camp from point to point; but Vendôme was not to be drawn. The Duke was restless; his letters show it. It seems he was never to enjoy the quiet for which he so much longed. He was fifty-seven, and his health was beginning to fail; and the complaints which the Duchess sent him, and the political anxieties which Godolphin expressed in almost every despatch, naturally weighed down even his buoyant temperament.

If Marlborough was reduced to inactivity through no fault of his own in 1707, he scored a veritable

triumph of another sort that year. Charles XII. of Sweden represented at that moment a new danger to the Grand Alliance. He had defeated Peter the Great at Narva, and, in defiance of Russia, had placed his own candidate on the throne of Poland. Louis XIV., scanning the horizon for a new ally, made overtures to Charles XII. in 1706, and it was Marlborough who brought them to naught by an opportune visit to that monarch. The Duke also paid diplomatic visits to the King of Prussia, the Elector of Saxony, and Stanislaus I. of Poland, and on his return to The Hague wrote to the Duchess on the 29th of April, stating that he had accomplished his mission of conciliation in eighteen days:

"Now that the journey is over I am extremely well pleased to have made it, since I am persuaded it will be of some use to the public and a good deal to the Queen. I shall not enter into particulars, having written at large to the Lord Treasurer. This journey has given me the advantage of seeing four Kings, three of whom I had never seen. They seem to be all very different in their kinds. If I was obliged to make a choice, it should be the youngest, which is the King of Sweden."<sup>1</sup>

One good result of the Duke's visit to Charles XII. was that he was able to tell the States-General that they might banish their fears concerning the supposed secret alliance between Sweden and France. His embassy to the Prussian Court settled some points of difficulty, and was not less timely. On quitting Charlottenburg, the Duke states the King "forced on me a diamond ring, valued at a thousand pounds." On his way back to The Hague, Marlborough broke his journey at Hanover, in order to inform the Elector of the happy outcome of his mission. His great achievement, of course, was that

Sweden declined the overtures of France. Charles XII., flattered by such an embassy, and charmed by the manner of Marlborough's approach, henceforth turned a deaf ear to all the blandishments of Versailles. Voltaire might well call the Duke the "cleverest diplomatist of his times."

The campaign of 1708, unlike that of the previous year, was memorable. Marlborough had been detained in England longer than usual, partly by the political changes which were then in progress, but still more by the threatened invasion of Scotland by the Chevalier de St. George, with the French at his back. The Duke, as Commander-in-Chief, instantly made preparations for bringing over troops from Holland, and took decisive steps to defend the coast. The young Prince, with a flotilla, consisting of five French men-of-war, sailed from Dunkirk; for Louis had persuaded himself that the son of James II. had only to appear in Scotland for multitudes to flock to his standard. But the vigilance of Admiral Sir George Byng compelled the French fleet, after gaining the Firth of Forth, to return; and the Chevalier de St. George, better known subsequently as the Old Pretender, chagrined at the collapse of the bold project, and eager to distinguish himself, if possible, elsewhere, joined the army in Flanders, which was now under the joint command of the Duke of Burgundy and the Duke of Vendôme.

The defeat at Ramillies had led the French in 1707 to play a waiting game. Louis XIV. was now, in reality, fighting for the defence of his own frontiers, and he had not appealed in vain to the pride of the nation, which was cut to the quick. The consequence was that the army in Flanders in the spring of 1708 consisted of 100,000 men; whilst the line of the Rhine was held by the Elector of Bavaria and the Duke of Berwick, Marlborough's nephew and natural



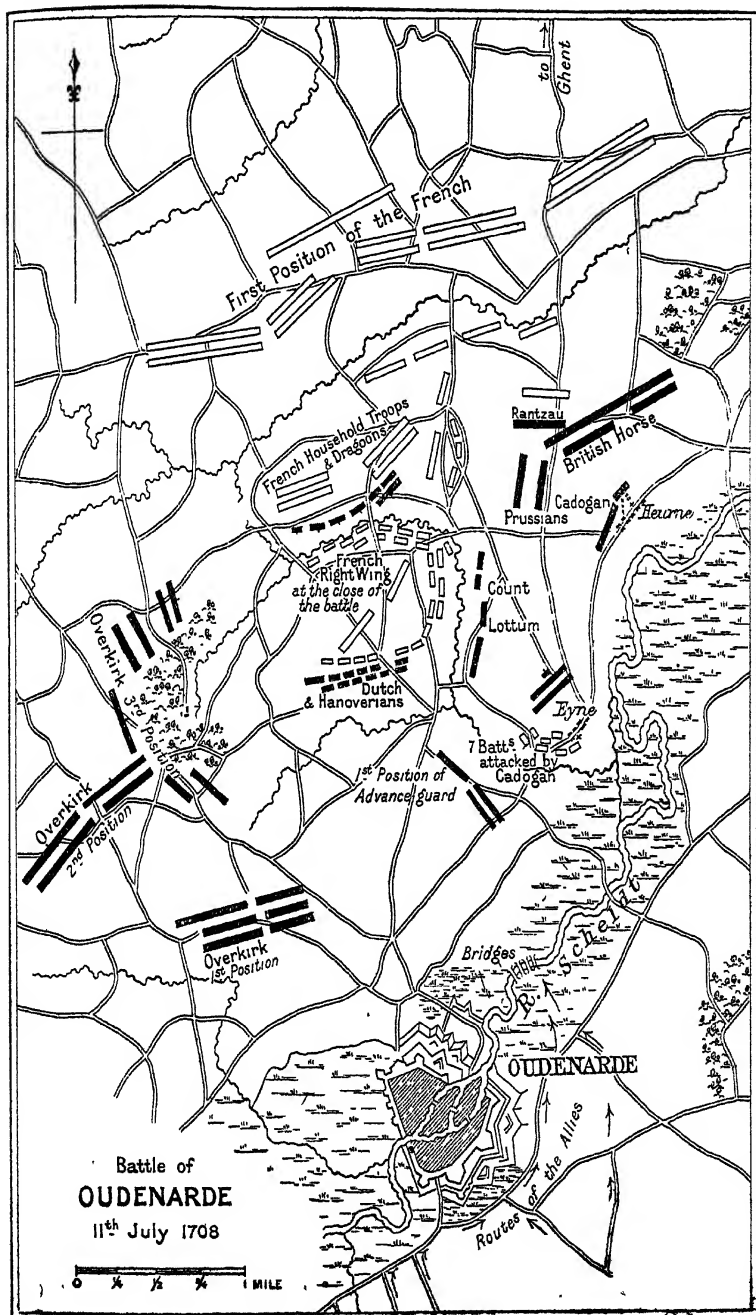
son of James II. by Arabella Churchill. It was because Louis XIV. had strong hopes of striking, once for all, a decisive blow against the Allies, that the Duke of Burgundy, heir to the throne, was placed in command, with his brother, the Duke of Berry, and the Chevalier de St. George at his side. The plan of campaign which Marlborough and Prince Eugene had concerted was, unhappily, frustrated. Briefly stated, it was that the Duke should hold Vendôme in check in the Netherlands, whilst Prince George of Hanover, afterwards George II., from opposite points, made a simultaneous movement against Alsace. Prince Eugene was powerless to march, through the failure of several of the German powers, notably Prussia and Saxony, to send contingents, and he therefore transferred his army of 35,000 men to the Netherlands, in order that Marlborough might be strong enough to strike a blow against the French. But, through the formalities of the Imperial Court, Prince Eugene was delayed, and the Duke was kept waiting a month without being able to do anything. Meanwhile, at the beginning of July, the Dukes of Burgundy and Vendôme suddenly broke up their camp, and, marching westward, captured the line of the Scheldt, Ghent and Bruges opening their gates to them.

The French were masters of Ghent on the 8th of July, and instantly Vendôme led his army against Oudenarde, a small fortified town on the Scheldt, of great strategical importance. Marlborough, not knowing in what direction Vendôme would turn, was holding a position which covered Brussels, whilst awaiting the arrival of Eugene. He saw now that he must give battle at once, without lingering for reinforcements; for if Oudenarde fell, the outlook for the Allies was critical.

Few incidents in the Duke's career were more

remarkable than the manner in which he forestalled the French at Oudenarde. Both Burgundy and Vendôme appear to have thought that Flanders lay at their mercy after the capitulation of Bruges and Ghent. They were, however, at cross-purposes, and moved slowly. Burgundy was young, inexperienced, and obstinate; he did not forget that he was the grandson of Louis XIV., and was inclined to stand upon his rank. Vendôme, a capable if somewhat harsh soldier, had borne the brunt of much hard fighting elsewhere, and was in consequence placed at a disadvantage by the young Prince, and the outcome was that Versailles had to pay for its vanity. The troops themselves were dispirited by the divided command, for nothing is more disastrous in war than a conflict of opinion, especially when a general action is imminent. On the 9th of July, Vendôme, who thought that he had outwitted Marlborough, approached Oudenarde, only to discover that the Duke had garrisoned the town; whilst the main body of his army stood between the French and their own frontier. Prince Eugene, with his staff, was at Marlborough's side, having galloped forward in front of his own army to join the Duke, who with almost incredible speed had marched his soldiers from Assche, where they had been quartered for the protection of Brussels. It was idle now to wait for the arrival of Prince Eugene's reinforcements, though they were only two days' march from Oudenarde.

The promptitude of Cadogan, one of the most capable and trusted of Marlborough's lieutenants, who was in command of the advance-guard, was beyond all praise on this occasion. He it was, acting under the Duke's orders, who prevented the French from escaping out of the net into which they had fallen. The simple truth was that Marlborough had outpaced Vendôme, and, when the latter saw that



the heights above Oudenarde were occupied by the English troops, he instantly called a halt to his own advancing army, and prepared to retire beyond the Scheldt, so as to ward off any attack on Bruges. But Cadogan, with 11,000 men, was too quick for him, for at dawn on the 11th of July he threw bridges across the river, just below Oudenarde. This enabled the Duke to give battle, though it was not until five in the afternoon that the fight began, with Marlborough in command of the left wing, and Prince Eugene of the right.

It was a stubborn and fierce action, for the French fought with conspicuous bravery; but as darkness fell, in spite of their superior numbers, they were slowly driven back, almost inch by inch, over treacherous and swampy ground. Overkirk distinguished himself in the battle by the splendid manner in which, when Marlborough was hard pressed, he responded to the Duke's orders to bring up twenty battalions of Dutch and Danes, with nearly all the cavalry of the left wing, in order, wheeling round the French right, to attack the enemy in the rear. The Dutch General, who had fought through all the campaigns of William III., as well as those of the War of the Spanish Succession, was not merely old, but was suffering from a mortal disease which ended his life that year; but at the critical moment of the struggle he responded to Marlborough's call with the enthusiasm of youth, and turned the French right; and the Duke, pressing home the advantage, won the battle.

The French lost 6,000 men killed and wounded, beside 9,000 prisoners; also many standards, 4,000 horses, and ten pieces of artillery. It was in the darkness of the night at Oudenarde that the drums of the Allies sounded the French retreat. Marlborough, in all his battles, never longed more ardently for one

more hour of daylight than at Oudenarde. Vendôme, during the confusion, did his best to keep the troops together until the morning; but the Duke of Burgundy sharply countermanded his orders, and, as his authority for the moment was law, the army fell back in ignominious retreat toward Ghent.

No battle that Marlborough ever fought was attended with such uncertain issues. He had moved an army of 80,000 men over some fifty miles of rough roads in sixty hours, and had crossed two rivers, one of them the Scheldt, before the eyes of the enemy, who might have shattered his force in the process if divided counsels had not prevailed. The Duke declared that, if he had been granted that other hour of daylight, the 11th of July would have ended the War of the Spanish Succession. The loss to the Allies in this great battle was 3,000 killed and wounded. The Duke of Burgundy was never in danger at Oudenarde; he watched the fight, with his royal brother, the Duke of Berry, from a church steeple, and went post-haste afterwards to tell the bitter news at Versailles.

Marlborough announced the victory to the Duchess in the following terms:

"*July 12th.* I have neither spirits nor time to answer your three last letters, this being to bring the good news of a battle we had yesterday, in which it pleased God to give us at last the advantage. Our Foot on both sides having been engaged, has occasioned much blood, but, I thank God, the English have suffered less than any of the other troops, none of our English Horse having been engaged. I do, and you must, give thanks to God for His goodness in protecting and making me the instrument of so much happiness to the Queen and nation, if she will please to make use of it."<sup>1</sup>

It is the letter of a tired man, and in the despatch to Godolphin which accompanied it he says: "My

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

head aches terribly." The Queen, writing from Windsor on the 22nd of July, to congratulate the Duke on the victory, makes pointed allusion to a remark which had fallen from him in a moment of dejection. He had told the Queen that "after this campaign" he would serve her as General, but not as Minister. Anne replied: "I shall always look upon you as both, and never separate those two characters, but ask your advice in both capacities on all occasions."<sup>1</sup>

There is a curious undated letter at Blenheim from the Queen to Marlborough, evidently written at this juncture, in which reference is made to her attitude towards Godolphin. It seems to have been written in reply to one from the Duke, who had advised Her Majesty to take measures that Parliament might uphold the Lord Treasurer's hands, "without which all must run to ruin." She impresses upon Marlborough the necessity of taking steps "that no cause be given to our friends abroad to think there is any fear of business going ill in England." Then follows a characteristic touch—"The Whigs and Tories are such bugbears that I dare not venture to write my mind freely of either of them, without a cypher, for fear of any accident. I pray God keep me out of the hands of both of them."<sup>2</sup>

The long strain of the war was beginning to tell even on Marlborough's splendid constitution, and he was ill at ease about the position of affairs in England, and saw only too clearly that the relations between the Queen and the Duchess were less cordial.

At this juncture, if Marlborough had been able to obtain his way, he would promptly have followed up the victory at Oudenarde by marching at once into the heart of France. Ever since the Battle of Blenheim he had realized that it was possible to invade

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

that country, and the dream of his life was to dictate terms to Louis XIV. at the gates of Paris. He believed that the opportune moment had come to humble the inordinate claims of France once for all. But the irony of his position was this: that every triumph he won over the enemy rendered Holland more secure, and the Dutch, who scarcely considered anything beyond its borders, more and more averse to war. Oudenarde was the final stroke which rendered their territory safe, and so they turned a cold shoulder to the Duke's bold design.

All through the War of the Spanish Succession the Dutch took short views; they were too self-centred, not to say selfish, to make any real sacrifice for the common cause. Prince Eugene, moreover, deemed the project too risky until the great fortress of Lille had surrendered. Marlborough, to his chagrin, was therefore compelled to abandon the invasion of France, and the rest of the campaign was spent in a stubborn siege, which lasted four months, of the great stronghold. Whilst the siege of Lille was proceeding, Vendôme rallied his forces, and, as soon as the Duke of Berwick came to his aid, found himself at the head of 110,000 men, and, proceeded, under orders from Versailles, to invest Brussels. The Duke marched to the relief of that city, and, rapidly covering seventy-nine miles without the loss of a single waggon, forced the passage of the Scheldt and liberated the city. The march thither, on the testimony of contemporary French historians, was one of the most notable achievements even in the career of Marlborough.

Lille was no ordinary city to besiege. All the genius of Vauban had been exhausted to make it impregnable. It was held by a garrison of 15,000 men, under the command of Marshal Boufflers, a most distinguished veteran in the French army; but

it fell on the 9th of December, after a memorable and historic siege. The Duke closed the campaign by the recapture of Ghent and Bruges.

He was bombarded with compliments for his victories in 1708. One of the most effusive was written by Henry St. John, afterwards Lord Bolingbroke, under date July 17:

"Your Grace will give me leave to express a joy which is too great and too severe to be silent. I most heartily congratulate you on this new addition to all the other glories of your life, which will be crowned, I make no doubt, by entirely reducing that Power against which we have so long contended, and by giving to your own country and to all Europe that peace and serenity which no one but you could procure for them. I shall inviolably preserve in my heart that gratitude for all your favours, that zeal for your service, and that true, unaffected love for your person, which I have never knowingly departed from."<sup>1</sup>

He subscribes himself as "your Grace's obedient, faithful, and most humble servant," and, not content with this, adds the assurance of his "greatest respect."

Yet, next to Harley, Bolingbroke was the chief cause of the Duke's undoing two or three years later. Well might the Duchess write the following bitter comment in her old age on the back of the original letter, which is preserved at Blenheim:

"I need not say anything of Mr. St. John's behaviour, when he got into power, to the Duke of Marlborough, but that the Duke never was so kind to any man as to him, and I have heard my Lord Godolphin (say) that he had never anything to reproach himself of in the whole time that he served the Queen but in complying with the Duke of Marlborough in doing unreasonable things in paying of money for St. John at the Duke's request."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



Parliament was so elated by the recent military events that the House of Commons could not wait, as on former occasions, to return him thanks, but sent Mr. Speaker to him at Brussels with a flattering message. But the Duke was ill at ease, for, as will presently appear, much had happened in 1707-08 in England, alike in the affairs of the nation and in the circle of the Court, which was not to his advantage. One reason why the Duke was anxious, at the very moment when congratulations over Oudenarde were pouring in upon him, was due to an act of indiscretion on the part of the Duchess, which brought to light the changed attitude of the Queen. She had forwarded impulsively to Windsor the Duke's hasty note written on the morrow of the battle, in which he expressed his thanks that the victory enabled him to be of service to the Queen, adding the words, and underlining them, "if she will please to make use of it." The Duchess caught at the expression, and, not content with allowing the letter to speak for itself, made it the text of a tirade of her own against the Queen's attitude to Marlborough. She also took the occasion to ventilate her own grievances in angry terms.

This led Her Majesty, in a letter of congratulation, written a few days later, to say:

"I was showed a letter the other day by a friend of yours, that you writ soon after the battle, and I must beg that you explain to me one expression in it. You say, after being thankful for being the instrument of so much good to the nation and me, 'if I would please to make use of it.' I am sure I will never make any ill use of so great a blessing, but according to the best of my understanding make the best use of it I can, and shall be glad to know what is the use you would have me make of it, and then I will tell you my thoughts very freely and sincerely."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

The Duke's reply, though courtly, was firm. He told the Queen that he was always ready to hazard his life in her service. He declared that he had nothing to ask either for himself or for his family, and that his only ambition was to end the few years that remained to him in the service of the Crown. Then he added the significant words:

"But as I have taken this resolution to myself, give me leave to say that you are obliged in conscience and as a good Christian to forgive, and to have no more resentments to any particular person or party, but to make use of such as will carry on this just war with vigour, which is the only way to preserve our religion and liberties, and the crown on your head."<sup>1</sup>

In a subsequent letter the Duke warned the Queen that nothing would be more fatal to her service than to discourage the Whigs, since, if she showed confidence in their zeal for her interests, they will all "concur very cheerfully to make you as great and happy as I wish." He explained the allusion, to which exception had been taken, by saying that it was written in great haste, and that he used it out of "my fulness of heart for your service."

"What I meant is that you can make no good use of this victory, nor of any other blessing, but by following the advice of My Lord Treasurer, who has been so long faithful to you; for any other advisers do but lead you into a labyrinth, to play their own game at your expense. Nothing but your commands should have obliged me to say so much, having taken my resolution to suffer with you, but not to advise, being sensible that if there were not something very extraordinary, Your Majesty would follow the advice of those that have served you so long, faithfully, and with success."<sup>2</sup>

This drew a reply from the Queen, which confirmed the Duke's impression that both his own influence

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. ii, p. 283.

and that of Godolphin had been somehow undermined, so he wrote to the Duchess warning her not to show his letters to anyone except the Lord Treasurer. He told her that he was aware, by letters from England, that people were beginning to find fault with him in all manner of ways, so he had come to the conclusion that if he was ever unfortunate he would run the risk of being called either a fool or a traitor.<sup>1</sup> The Duchess had the good sense to take the hint which the Duke had given her, and from this time onwards wrote nothing to the Queen without consulting Lord Godolphin; but, unluckily, her previous impetuous and angry letters, though as yet Marlborough did not know it, had gone far to alienate Her Majesty. It must be borne in mind that what prompted the tone of Marlborough's letters to the Queen in 1708 were the apprehensions of Godolphin, and the grievances, real or imaginary, of the Duchess. He saw clearly from their letters that the political authority of the statesman who had always been his trusted friend was challenged, and that the social ascendancy of the woman who was more to him than all the world was seriously, if not permanently, diminished.

His own letters at this period, and they are many, reveal his keen interest in the building of Blenheim, which he regarded as a haven of retreat, and contain allusions to the pictures he was buying at Brussels for its walls, and the hope that the fierce sunshine of that summer was ripening the peaches in his garden. He describes the movements of the Dukes of Berwick and Vendôme, hints at the measures he had taken to bring their plans to confusion, alike at Lille and at Brussels, and, above all, conjures the Duchess, in a time so uneasy, not to lay too much stress on trifles or to give any just cause for offence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Much had happened in England during those two years. Lord Sunderland had been appointed Secretary of State, and the Whigs, backed by a Parliament in which they had a majority, were doing everything in their power to gain the upper hand. The Union of England and Scotland, one of the greatest measures of Queen Anne's reign, had become an accomplished fact, and the people of the new United Kingdom were beginning to grow restless and impatient under the burden of the war. In 1708 Harley and St. John, after ceaseless intrigues against Godolphin, were driven out of office by that statesman's firm attitude. This crisis was brought about by the Lord Treasurer's refusal to continue at the head of affairs unless the Queen sanctioned their removal. Marlborough hesitated over this ultimatum on the ground that he did not think it wise that the Whigs should gain exclusive ascendancy in the Cabinet. But Godolphin stood firm, and the Duke eventually supported his demand. The Queen fought against it; but when Godolphin and Marlborough declared that the only alternative was their resignation, she gave way, and for a time the Whigs were supreme in the Cabinet.

It has been said, and with truth, that Godolphin began his government with Tory colleagues appointed by the Queen; that he continued it with a mixed administration of his own devising; and, that though he himself had entered public life as a Tory, he was destined to end it in an exclusively Whig Cabinet. He never would have held office during the seven most critical years of the reign if the Duke had not insisted that he should be at the head of the Treasury. Marlborough made Godolphin indispensable during the War of the Spanish Succession, because he declared that he would not take command in the field unless the statesman in whom he placed implicit confidence—it was never abused—was in authority at home.

The Ministry of Godolphin and Marlborough was, in truth, what Lecky has called it—"one of the most glorious in English history."<sup>1</sup> It had its triumphs of peace as well as of war, for it settled a great outstanding question by the Union of England and Scotland in 1707.

How well Godolphin managed the finances of the nation all through that crisis is shown by the following words:

"The war was paid for out of increased taxation, and not out of borrowed money, and campaigns, in which Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet were fought, only raised the National Debt from rather less than £13,000,000 in 1702 to rather more than £21,000,000 in 1710, or by about £1,000,000 a year."<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of Godolphin from power in 1710, the Tories, under Harley and St. John, made short work of his policy of economy. In the three succeeding years, during which the war dragged on ingloriously, no less a sum than £14,000,000 was added to the National Debt—nearly twice the sum which Godolphin had found it necessary to borrow to subsidize Marlborough's military campaigns during no less than eight years of tremendous strain and stress.<sup>3</sup>

In one of the letters of the Duke to the Queen cited in this chapter, there is a guarded allusion to "something very extraordinary"<sup>4</sup> which had happened during his absence abroad. That "something" was the rapid advancement at Court, by a process which must next be described, of the Duchess of Marlborough's humble kinswoman, Abigail Hill.

<sup>1</sup> "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," by W. E. H. Lecky, vol. i, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Spencer Walpole, "Essays Political and Biographical" (1908): Sidney, Earl of Godolphin, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Spencer Walpole, "Essays Political and Biographical" (1908): Sidney, Earl of Godolphin, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Blenheim Papers.

## CHAPTER XVI

### NEW FORCES IN COURT AND CABINET

HARLEY, though neither a statesman of strong brains nor political vision, had wheedling manners and was adroit at a compliment. He had a passion for intrigue, and cultivated an air of mystery, and, as a woman was ruler, he knew the value of the backstairs and the fascination of agreeable tattle. Men said of him that he earned a reputation for wisdom by his capacity for holding his tongue, yet it wagged freely enough in private audiences in the Queen's closet. He never would have dreamed of demurring, even in the most guarded and deferential tones, to any statement expressed by the Queen. Harley was, in short, in the jargon of the day, a trimmer, if such a term can be applied to a statesman who could cajole his Sovereign into the adoption of his own political views. The Duchess of Marlborough prided herself beyond everything else on her candour. Her secretary, Arthur Maynwaring, a cool man of the world, a wit as well as a scholar, declared that the Duchess had no "crooked wisdom." Her moral courage was superb; it is possible to admire it at the expense of her prudence. She was in no danger of gaining a reputation for wisdom by the simple process of taking refuge in silence. She said exactly what she thought, and did so in scorn of consequences. There is always risk in such an attitude towards others, and the peril of impulsive headlong speech is never more pronounced than at a Court, where plain truths are unusual and apt to be misunderstood.





*Sarah Duchess of Marlborough  
from a picture by Kneller.*





During the early years of the reign, probably no two women ever lived on such terms of intimacy as Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman. They were inseparable, and apparently one had not a thought which the other did not share. Mrs. Morley outdid Mrs. Freeman in protestations of ardent affection. She did not possess the strength of character of her confidante; on the contrary, she was vacillating, pliant, and in no sense self-reliant. Mrs. Freeman was resolute, uncompromising, and had clean-cut opinions of everything under the sun. As time went on, Mrs. Morley grew more and more depressed; her children, one after another, faded out of life. After the death of the young Duke of Gloucester she always, when writing to Mrs. Freeman, signed herself, "Your poor, unfortunate, faithful Morley." When Prince George died in 1708 she grew moody and dispirited; she thought that the judgment of God had overtaken her, and began to reproach herself bitterly because of her desertion of her father. Her thoughts turned also to the question of the succession to the throne. She disliked the House of Hanover, and this sentiment became more pronounced when the old Electress Sophia began to show an interested anxiety in the Queen's health. It would appear that, from this time onwards, Anne cherished a secret sentimental longing that her young brother, the Chevalier de St. George, might in due time reign in her stead as rightful King.

Queen Anne was a Stuart, proud of her blood, but she lacked the personal magnetism, the resistless charm, and assuredly the impulsive audacity, of her race. She was more conscientious than the majority of the Stuarts, and less courageous, and, even when due allowance is made for her sex, she could never do the daring things either in personal conduct or public policy which startled the world when Charles II.

and James II. held sway. Anne was a staid, matter-of-fact Queen, of quiet tastes and serious disposition. Charles II. once laughingly asserted that it was a characteristic of the House of Stuart that every member of it could sleep through a sermon. Queen Anne was the inevitable exception. She doted on Bishops, and was punctilious in her demeanour at Church. The Stuarts have been described as a family of artists, despised by a nation of shopkeepers. But Queen Anne again broke the record, for she had not a particle of the artistic temperament, and the nation of shopkeepers adored her. The majority of her race possessed a keen sense of humour; they could laugh and make allowances; but in this direction, also, Her Majesty, with all her virtues, was deficient. It was because of her negative, rather than her positive, qualities that she became known as "Good Queen Anne."

George II. was once discussing the characteristics of the Stuart Sovereigns. He declared that all of them had been ruled by courtiers, mistresses, or priests, and he added that the last of them was under the dominion of the women about her. The King's verdict was both shrewd and true. Queen Anne, in the heyday of her power, when one glorious victory followed another in rapid and almost bewildering succession, was ruled by the Duchess of Marlborough. In the closing years of her life, when the spirit of faction rose high and everything seemed falling into confusion, she was in the leading-strings of Mrs. Masham. It has been said, and with truth, that it is easy to understand the sway which the Duchess gained over the Queen, since a woman who could govern Marlborough was capable of governing anyone in the world. There is ample evidence that the Duchess, until her temper was hopelessly spoilt by the chagrin inspired by the failure of her ambition,

though always a haughty woman, possessed a charm, a vivacity, and a sparkling wit, which assured her the conquest of hearts. The pity is—it spells the tragedy of her life—that, with all her fine qualities and unquestionable ability, she could not govern herself. The art of life, Madame de Sévigné used to say, consists in pretending not to see; but the Duchess had the eyes of a hawk, and, if she saw anything that ruffled her, she launched forth instantly into angry protestations.

One of Marlborough's favourite axioms was "Patience conquers all things." He practised what he preached, and again and again, under circumstances which, had he been a weak man, would have made him rail at the irony of fortune, he held his peace and, bided his time. The Duchess, on the contrary, continually spoke unadvisedly with her lips, and in the attempt to set things right, contrived constantly to set them wrong. People of great independence of character, especially if that quality is united to disconcerting freedom of speech, seldom have intimate friends, and to this rule the Duchess was not an exception. Men were shy of paying compliments to her, in spite of her beauty and humour, because they instinctively knew that she saw through them, and they never could tell what retort she would make. Women of social rank felt the same constraint, and all the more because reason was her strong point rather than sentiment. Hence it was that, with the Duke continually abroad, and her daughters all married, the Duchess grew lonely. The Queen's conversation was not exhilarating. It turned almost invariably on three or four topics—her health, the cut of a mantle, the gossip of the town, the political virtues of the Tories, or the Church as the chief bulwark of the Throne. The Duchess scorned valetudinarians, despised tittle-tattle, hated the Tories, and was not in the least troubled about the Church. The consequence was

she ran off to Blenheim, as Godolphin put it, to pry into what Vanbrugh was about,<sup>1</sup> or to St. Albans to busy herself in a local election, or to the Old Lodge in Windsor Park to sun herself in her garden. It was a little unfortunate, for the Queen, being a jealous woman, drew conclusions. It was maladroit that she paraded her love of Windsor when the Court was not at the Castle. Lady Sunderland, the most dutiful of her daughters, the "Little Whig" whom men of quality toasted at the Kit-Cat Club, though meek, was valiant. She told her mother that she was making a mistake, and even ventured to hint that prolonged absence from the Court—it sometimes extended to six weeks at a stretch—was a dangerous tax on the Queen's patience.<sup>2</sup> It was more dangerous than Lady Sunderland knew when she made her deferential protest, for it gave Abigail Hill opportunity to ingratiate herself with offended Majesty.

The Queen could not live without someone at her side, who paid her endless attentions and studied her every whim. She was strangely dependent on the people about her, and, so long as she had some one person to share her confidence, she sat very lightly to everybody else at Kensington or St. James's. Abigail Hill was the exact opposite of the Duchess in temperament and bearing. She has been described as a smooth and noiseless woman, soft-spoken, deferential, obsequious. The Queen, who had treated her at first with blended condescension and disdain, as a useful, unimportant person, to be tolerated rather than trusted, and, above all else, to be kept in her proper place, gradually relaxed her mood. Eventually—annoyed at the unaccommodating temper of the Duchess and her frequent and sudden departures from the Court—the Queen admitted Mistress Hill almost unconsciously to intimacy. The lady, thus honoured,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

was prepared to do anything at a moment's notice, even menial duties, such as the Duchess would never have tolerated. She was, in short, always at hand and always at attention, and this, linked as it was to flattery and adulation, made her—though the Duchess was long in discovering the fact—a woman of consequence at a Court where small things counted.

As Mistress Hill's ascendancy with the Queen increased, she began to fight shy of the Duchess, and kept out of her way as much as possible. She was reserved and uneasy when they met, and, after the ordinary civilities, relapsed into silence. The Duchess attributed this to what she calls her kinswoman's "peculiar moroseness of temper," but this change of bearing presently became so pronounced as to raise conjectures as to what it really meant. At length the Duchess heard by a side-wind that Abigail Hill had been secretly married in the summer of 1707, at the lodgings of Dr. Arbuthnot, the Queen's physician, to Mr. Samuel Masham, Equerry and Groom of the Bedchamber to Prince George of Denmark, and that Her Majesty was not only aware of the circumstance, but had honoured the ceremony by her presence. The Duchess, who had befriended Abigail from girlhood, and had introduced her to the Court, though a near relative, had neither been consulted about the match nor bidden to the wedding. Startled by such news, the Duchess was inclined to treat it as mere idle gossip without a shadow of foundation, but on making further inquiry, she was told, from an independent source, a more circumstantial story, which it was impossible to dismiss.

Here it may be as well to cite the Duchess's account of what followed:

"I went to her and asked her if it were true; she owned it was, and begged my pardon for having concealed it from me. As much as I had to take ill

this reserve in her behaviour, I was willing to impute it to bashfulness and want of breeding rather than to anything worse. I embraced her with my usual tenderness, and very heartily wished her joy."<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess proceeds to say that she offered to provide Mrs. Masham with better apartments, and that she was prepared to make matters easy with the Queen. Mrs. Masham, thinking that Her Majesty's presence at the wedding was a secret, which was not likely to leak out, replied with an innocent air that the Bedchamber Women had already acquainted Her Majesty with the event. The Duchess saw at once that she was dissimulating, and dropped the conversation. The matter could not rest at that point, so she adds:

"I went presently to the Queen and asked her why she had not been so kind as to tell me of my cousin's marriage. All the answer I could obtain from Her Majesty was this: 'I have a hundred times bid Masham tell it you, and she would not.'"<sup>2</sup>

Amongst the Blenheim Papers there are letters that passed between Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman when their relations were beginning to be strained. One undated note is endorsed by the Duchess:

"A copy of a letter from the Queen when she feared I had found out her intimacy with Mrs. Masham and therefore desired me not to speak to her, but to write when I was in the spleen—for fearing, I suppose, that she would blush."

It is rather a pitiful little note, whatever was its occasion, and it shows that, if Anne were in the toils of Mrs. Masham, she was troubled with compunction:

"I cannot forbear telling you why I disowned my being in the spleen this morning, and the cause of my being so. My poor heart is so tender that I durst

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

not tell you what was the matter with me, because I knew if I had begun to speak, I should not have been fit to be seen by anybody, and therefore thought it better to let it alone at that time. The reason of my being in the spleen was that I fancied by your looks and things that you have sometimes let fall that you have hard and wrong thought of me. I should be very glad to know what they are that I might clear myself, but let it be in writing, for I dare not venture to speak with you for the reason I have told you already. . . . Don't let anybody see this strange scrawl."<sup>1</sup>

The growing coolness between them comes into view in another letter not dated, but evidently written in reply to one from the Duchess in answer to that just quoted:

"I am sorry to find by my dear Mrs. Freeman's letter I received this evening that she continues to have such strange hard thoughts of me. Certainly you can never think, after all the assurances I have given you of my kindness, that I ever could have a thought of parting with you. I hope Mr. Freeman and Mr. Montgomery will never forsake me. I will never give them cause, nor never will forsake them, nor my dear Mrs. Freeman, who, whenever she has any commands for her faithful Morley, will let (her) receive them from yourself, that being the way that will always be the most agreeable to me."<sup>2</sup>

The Duchess has endorsed the letter with the comment that when it was written the Queen was coming under Abigail's designs.

Her Majesty would never have come, to any appreciable extent, under Mrs. Masham's designs if that lady had stood alone. Addison, who had written the commemorative poem on the Battle of Blenheim—which took the wind out of the sails of countless other writers of complimentary verse—had, as a reward, been made an Under-Secretary of State. He throws light on a new influence which then came into play.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



Harley, he tells us, had "just found out that he stood in the same relation to Mrs. Masham as the Duchess of Marlborough." There was this difference, however, between them. Harley gave the cold shoulder to his cousin until she had caught the fancy of the Queen, whilst the Duchess befriended her when she was in poor circumstances and quite unknown. He stood in exactly the same relation to Abigail Hill on the other side of the family, and it taxes credulity to suppose that he only found out that she was his kinswoman when the tide of fortune set her way. He was clever enough to see that, if he paid her assiduous court, she could advance his interests with the Queen. He fed her with compliments, climbed into favour with her aid, and made her his cat's-paw. They were both much more to the mind of the Queen than either the Duchess or Godolphin. Her Majesty leaned to the Tories, Abigail—a Jacobite at heart—was of the same way of thinking. Mr. Secretary Harley, though still a member of Godolphin's Government, only waited for an opportunity to poison the Queen's mind against my Lord Treasurer and the Duke. There is documentary evidence at Blenheim that Harley, as early as May, 1706, began his "undermining operations" by telling Mrs. Morley that she was but a "cypher" as long as the Churchills were in favour.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Masham had a further advantage in the Queen's eyes—she was a narrow-minded Churchwoman, who chimed in with forebodings of her own whenever Her Majesty expressed her fears of the Catholics.

Godolphin was not a master of small-talk. The tremendous burden of public affairs was on his back, and the prolonged strain, involved in supplying the Duke with the sinews of war, was beginning to tell on his splendid constitution, and all the more because,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

with the ceaseless political intrigues which were now in process, he was compelled to be taciturn and wary, scarcely knowing whom he could trust. It was to Marlborough, and to Marlborough alone, that he revealed himself in admirable letters, which cannot here be cited, though they do him infinite credit. Hence it was, with the Duchess indignant and holding herself aloof from Court, and Godolphin preoccupied and immersed in affairs, that Mrs. Masham and Mr. Secretary Harley, putting their heads together in secret conclaves over the tea-table, hit upon the way to bring about that estrangement of the Queen which was to culminate in the overthrow of the Ministry, the dismissal of the Duchess, and the fall of Marlborough. All this, of course, did not emerge at once. Probably it would never have come about at all if the Duchess had not taken the bit in her teeth, and refused, with characteristic hauteur, to accept the shrewd advice of Godolphin, and to listen to the expostulations of the Duke. She would never have been driven from Court if she had not given her enemies the advantage, and if she had retained her place there Godolphin might have died Prime Minister, and the Duke's military career would not have ended under a cloud. As it was, she brought about the undoing of a statesman who held her in chivalrous respect, and of the man who, with an undivided heart, adored her. Godolphin could have baffled the intrigues which overthrew him, and the detractions of his enemies would have been powerless against Marlborough, if the Duchess had shown discretion and taken pains—at least whilst the war lasted—to retain her ascendancy with the Queen.

The Duke's letters, written from abroad at this period, reveal his uneasiness at the turn which matters were taking at the Court. The Duchess had told him that the Queen avoided seeing her in private as much

as she could, and was no longer free or easy in her intercourse with her. She told him also that Mrs. Masham was in favour, and that Mr. Secretary Harley, through her influence, had gained the Queen's ear. He replied, under date, August 6, 1708:

"The account you give me of the commerce and kindness of the Queen to Mrs. Masham is that which will bring at last all things to ruin, for by all you write I see she is determined to support and, I believe, at last to own her. . . . The discovery you have made of the Queen's having the opinion that she has friends which will support her can be no other than the Tories; and it is true they would ruin the Lord Treasurer and me, and will be able to bring it about, if it can be thought ruin to be put in the condition of quietness, which of all things, I wish for; but not forced to it, which I shall certainly be if Mrs. Masham remains in that credit you say, and I believe she has, with the Queen."<sup>1</sup>

Three days later he writes again to the Duchess, stating his conviction that the Tories had got "entire possession of the Queen," and would be able to maintain it as long as Mrs. Masham had credit.<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that the Duke, though sore at Her Majesty's neglect of his letters, defended her against the Duchess's imputations. There are many proofs that Marlborough held Queen Anne in high regard, and all that he would admit was that she was misled by Mrs. Masham. He met the Duchess's angry words by protesting his love for the Queen, and his desire to serve her as long as life lasted. He states that he could not think, in any case, of relinquishing his post whilst the war lasted, though again and again he makes it plain how ardently he longed for peace, and, with it, release from the burden of authority. His thoughts turned constantly to Blenheim. He was

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers, cited also by Coxe.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, cited more fully by Coxe, vol. ii., p. 286.

afraid that, if the war lasted much longer, his chance of enjoying that house would be small. He asks continually about its progress, and states that he was buying pictures for the adornment of its walls. It represented to him the relief which he desired from strenuous activity. But he realized, if the war was to be brought to a triumphant conclusion, Godolphin must be maintained in power, and therefore the Duchess needed to walk circumspectly; so he begged her not to dwell too much on trifles, and all the more since other than personal interests were at stake.

The Duke knew more of the Queen's side of the story than he judged it politic to tell the Duchess. In March, 1708, just before he went abroad for the campaign, which culminated in the Battle of Oudenarde and the capture of Lille, Her Majesty wrote to him in the following terms:

"I have had a great mind to speak to you this week, but when I have met with an opportunity I have found such a tenderness coming upon me on the thought of the subject I was to speak of, that I choose rather to trouble you this way with my complaints than any other. You know I have often had the misfortune of falling under the Duchess of Marlborough's displeasure, and now, after several reconciliations, she is again relapsed into her cold unkind way, and by a letter she wrote to me on Monday, I find she has taken a resolution not to come to me when I am alone, and fancies nobody will take notice of the change. She may impose upon some poor simple people, but how can she imagine she can on any that have a grain of sense? Can she think that the Duchess of Somerset and my Lady Fitzharding, who are two of the most observing, prying ladies in England, won't find out that she never comes near me nor looks on me as she used to do, that the tatling voice will not in a little time make us the jest of the town? Some people will blame her, others me, and a great many both. What a disagreeable noise she will be the occasion of making in the world besides, God

knows, of what ill consequences it may be of, therefore for God Almighty's sake, for the Duchess of Marlborough's, your own, and my poor sake, endeavour all you can to persuade Mrs. Freeman out of this strange unreasonable resolution. I have not as yet ventured to make any answer to her letter, nor dare not, for till this violent humour be over all I can say, though never so reasonable, will but inflame her more."

The Queen went on to add that she was not conscious that she had done anything to deserve the unkindness of which she complained, and to protest that she was not "such a strange creature as Mrs. Freeman imagined." Then she adds:

"Whatever she may do I hope you will never forsake Mrs. Morley, who, though she can never say enough to express her true sense of the sincere friendship you have shown to her on all occasions, nor how much she values it, yet to her last moment will continue as she is now with all truth and faithfulness your humble servant."<sup>1</sup>

The Duke, it will be seen, was between galling cross-fires. He felt that the Duchess was putting herself in the wrong, and the position was the more annoying to him because Godolphin, whose political burdens were already sufficiently great, was placed at a disadvantage through the growing coolness of the Queen and the Duchess. Marlborough did all that was possible to bring them to terms, but when the Duchess kept telling him one story after another of real or imaginary affront, and the Queen ceased to write to him, it was only natural that his sympathies went with his wife, though he implored her to try and keep the peace, at all events, until the war had been pushed to a triumphal conclusion, since the honour of the nation was at issue. She, however, went her own way, and it must be admitted that Mrs. Masham

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

was sufficiently exasperating. She had the audacity to tell the Duchess, shortly after the latter became aware of her intimacy with the Queen, that she was "sure that Her Majesty, who had loved Lady Marlborough so extremely, would always be kind to her." The comment of the Duchess on that statement was characteristic:

"This was very surprising, that she, that had just before pretended to live at so humble a distance from the Queen, should presently forget herself, and in the very next breath take upon her to know so much of the Queen's mind as to be sure she would be very kind to me. It was very shocking to me to be assured of the Queen's favour by one that I had raised from starving, and to whom I had given the opportunity of getting that favour to herself of which she had made so ill a use of."<sup>1</sup>

When the marriage of Mrs. Masham was publicly announced, the Duchess, to save appearances, made a formal call upon her. "But this great lady never thought fit to return my visit or take any further notice of me." She adds that, soon after this, both the Duke and Lord Godolphin found that the Queen began to raise unusual difficulties in matters of public business, and that "Mr. Harley, by the help of Mrs. Masham, used all the arts that were possible to disturb and embroil the affairs of the nation, thinking to find his own account in it."

Nettled by Mrs. Masham's failure to return her call, and the Queen's reiteration that she misjudged that lady, the Duchess wrote as follows to Her Majesty:

"When I was last at Windsor I found the enclosed letter from my dear cousin Hill, in which she used this expression to me, 'You are so far happy, that your greatest enemies never reproach you, either with want of sense or sincerity,' and she concludes with ex-

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

pressions of her own sincerity, and that she is my faithful servant. I have several letters that show the care I took of her whole family, of the brother that is dead, as well as the one who has shown himself to be of the same principle as his sister;—and she has acknowledged under her hand that never any family have received such benefits as she and hers have done from me, which I will keep to show the world, what return she has made for obligation that she was sensible of. Whether she spoke the same language of me to Your Majesty I cannot tell, though at first I am apt to think, she was too artful to rail at me, but rather pretended to have a kindness for me, and, like Iago, gave, as the occasion, wounds in the dark, and so got a footing by making Her Majesty think that she loved you extremely, but let that be as it will, I believe she has changed her note as to me a good while, and I think, notwithstanding the conclusion of her own letter, in which she professes so much sincerity, she has given sufficient demonstration that she has none. But after all this Your Majesty says, ‘this fine lady is the very reverse of what I take her to be.’ To which I can only answer that she is the very reverse of what I once took her to be, and I don’t at all doubt but when her master Harley has tutored her a little longer—if I do not die very soon—Your Majesty and I shall come to agree in our opinion of her.”<sup>1</sup>

On the Thanksgiving Day for the victory of Oudenarde, the Duchess was guilty of a grave indiscretion. She had always selected the jewels to be worn by Her Majesty on state occasions, and the Queen had invariably accepted her services; but when she was preparing for the solemn *Te Deum* at St. Paul’s she declined to wear the gems which the Duchess had chosen. This in itself was a trivial matter, but the Duchess seized upon it as a personal affront, and thought that Mrs. Masham had prompted it. There is no proof that such was the case, but there is evidence, enough and to spare, of the

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

anger the incident inspired. As the procession passed through the streets, amidst the acclamations of the crowd, the Duchess, who rode in Her Majesty's coach, assailed her with bitter comments, and exclaimed that the Duke, as well as herself, felt that they had her confidence no longer. On quitting the cathedral these complaints were renewed, and, on the steps, as the Queen turned to reply, the Duchess abruptly requested her to drop the conversation lest the people should hear it. A few days later she wrote to the Queen a letter; renewing her charge of ingratitude, and placed the Duke at a disadvantage by enclosing a note he had written—intended for her eyes alone—which seemed to give colour to the statement she had made about his attitude. The Queen wrote in reply:

"After the commands you gave me in the Church on the Thanksgiving of not answering you, I should not have troubled you with these lines but to return the Duke of Marlborough's letter safe into your hands."<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess felt she had put herself in the wrong, and replied:

"Though I have always writ to you as a friend and lived with you as such for so many years, with all the truth, honesty, and zeal for your service that was possible, yet I shall never forget that I am your subject, nor cease to be a faithful one."<sup>2</sup>

This was followed by an interview, from which both the Queen and the Duchess retired in tears.

Meanwhile lampoons were beginning to appear, and ballads were hawked about the streets, chiefly of a kind which threw ridicule on Mrs. Masham. The Duchess sent specimens of them to the Queen, stating that it was not to be expected that her new favourite would acquaint Her Majesty of such effusions, since

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.



they told against her, " though the town and country are full of them." She went on to say that justice wisdom, and constancy, were the marks of a great reputation:

" I hope your Majesty will forgive me if I cannot think it was very just to disgrace your faithful servants for some that have betrayed you, nor very wise to disoblige all the honest part of the nation for a few inconsiderable people of ill principle and no interest, nor, if I may be allowed to say so, was it any great proof of Your Majesty's constancy to leave Lord Marlborough and me for Mr. Harley and a woman that I took out of a garret."<sup>1</sup>

She maintained that it was idle for the Queen to assert that the Duke had still the same credit with her as before, since he had not gained her approval for " anything of consequence that he has advised in his letters this year out of Flanders."<sup>2</sup> She told the Queen, moreover, that Harley was writing by every post to Holland, stating that the Duke and Godolphin were " quite out of favour." She reminded the Queen that her father, James II., had been " sung out of his kingdom by silly ballads," and warned her not to hazard everything rather than displease Abigail. She declared that Mrs. Masham was not competent to give advice of any kind, and yet the Queen seemed inclined to pin her faith to " nobody but a chamber-maid, whom I took from a broom as the ballad says rightly." " The cause of all the disturbance," exclaimed the Duchess, with a delightful forgetfulness of her own share in it, was " that base woman and the creatures that govern her."

Whilst these unseemly wrangles were in progress, Prince George of Denmark was slowly dying. The Duchess states that—

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"Through the whole summer after Mr. Harley's dismissal the Queen continued to have secret correspondence with him. That this might be the better managed, she stayed all the sultry season, even when the Prince was panting for breath, in the small house she had purchased at Windsor, which, though as hot as an oven, was then said to be cool, because from the park such persons as Mrs. Masham had a mind to bring to Her Majesty could be let in privately by the garden."<sup>1</sup>

Harley had, in consequence, many private audiences, and seems to have done his best to turn the Queen's mind from Godolphin and Marlborough, both of whom attributed to his advice Her Majesty's sudden coolness to their proposals on matters of state for the conduct of the war.

The death of Prince George at Kensington, in October, 1708, deprived both Godolphin and Marlborough of one who had always steadily supported their policy. It did more than this, for it removed from the Queen's side a Prince who had a genuine regard for the Duchess. The latter lost, just as her own position became critical, her most powerful friend at Court. It was Prince George who, in the spring of that year, had persuaded the Queen to dismiss Harley, whom he never trusted, and to uphold Godolphin at home and Marlborough abroad. Queen Anne declared after his death that the Prince had never known of her difficulties with the Duchess. He therefore had no opportunity of acting as a peacemaker. The Queen was stunned by the death of her consort, and for a time refused to quit his private apartments. The Duchess declares that Her Majesty sat for weeks at St. James's Palace in one or other of two little back rooms looking out on a court, and refused to leave them, because the Prince had spent the last days of his

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 222.

life within their walls. So matters stood when 1708 ended. The wind had shifted, so far as the Duchess was concerned, from south to north. No wonder that the Duke, with the war still unended, was uneasy, and more inclined than ever to covet the quiet of Blenheim.

Marlborough's opinion is significant. He told the Duchess that he could not entirely agree with her opinion of the Queen, for whom he felt a certain "tenderness." He added: "I would willingly believe that all which is amiss proceeds from the ambition and ill-judgment of Mrs. Masham, and the knavery and artfulness of Harley."<sup>1</sup>

Blenheim Papers.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE YEAR OF MALPLAQUET

THE building of Blenheim meanwhile was proceeding slowly—so slowly that it taxed the patience of the Duke and the temper of the Duchess. It may be added that it placed an unwonted strain alike on the patience and temper of Vanbrugh. He was sailing before the wind at the time, not only as an architect, but as a dramatist, and the Duchess appears to have thought that he was too much engrossed with theatrical matters and the applause of the town to give adequate attention to the workpeople at Woodstock. Anyhow, the Duchess and Vanbrugh were constantly at cross-purposes. He resented her interference in questions of detail, and she imagined that he gave himself airs and was inclined to take too much upon himself. Vanbrugh was not diplomatic; the Duchess was scarcely considerate; both of them were strong-willed, and so inevitably there arose a clash of opinion.

The first serious difficulty was over the removal or retention of the ancient and picturesque, but dismantled and almost ruined, royal residence in the park. It stood on the knoll, at a distance of about half a mile, nearly opposite the main entrance of the palace, which was in process of erection. The Duchess ordered it out of the way. She brooked no rival either at Woodstock or at Windsor. She declared it spoilt the view, and she did not desire a ruined building, though it might look romantic and was historic, in full view of the house. Vanbrugh, on the

contrary, held that just because this old hunting-lodge of the Kings of England was picturesque, and had about it the glamour of historical associations, it ought to remain. He pressed the point so hard that the Duchess suspected ulterior motives, and jumped to the conclusion that he really wanted to preserve it as a place of residence for himself, at all events so long as Blenheim was building, and how long that might be neither she nor anybody else could determine. It does not appear that there was any ground for the suspicion. Vanbrugh was too fond of society and the gay life of the capital to covet the seclusion of Woodstock. The true ground of his opposition to the removal of the old embattled place was his possession of the artistic temperament and his wish to give his own building a dramatic setting. The Duchess was not endowed with the artistic temperament, and, in consequence, did not care a straw about the poetry of association. She triumphed, her word was law, but it poisoned her relations with the architect, and paved the way for many subsequent wrangles on points of less moment. Henceforth Vanbrugh walked about the works of Blenheim abashed and exasperated, though he retained, as his letters show, an air of punctilious deference until there came an open quarrel. The Duchess, on the contrary, was less guarded. She distrusted a man who dabbled as freely in ink as in mortar, and kept a sharp eye on all his doings.

Her growing estrangement from the Queen did not heighten the attractions of Blenheim in her eyes. The splendid palace was supposed to be taking shape, stone by stone, as a monument of Her Majesty's gratitude, and deep in the heart of the Duchess there rankled, rightly or wrongly, the sense that the Queen's gratitude was dwindling away. She did not, in consequence, share the Duke's enthusiasm concerning the

house, and she was a little bored by his continual requests from abroad for explicit information as to its progress. It almost seems as if, in the spring of 1709, she had come to the conclusion that it was only a question of time before she would be compelled, by Her Majesty's change of attitude, to relinquish her position at Court, and with it her apartments at St. James's. It was in such a mood that she set about in that year the building of Marlborough House. The Duke, though he yielded, did not like the scheme. He thought it inopportune, and seems to have anticipated the view, which the town presently took, that the Churchill ascendancy was declining.

The site which the Duchess desired for her town-house was the Friary Grounds, close to St. James's Palace. They were so called because they contained the old houses where Catherine of Braganza lodged the priests who came in her train from Portugal. The buildings where these ecclesiastics had sheltered still stood; and as Pall Mall was at that time one of the most fashionable residential quarters of the town, the position, apart from its proximity to the Court, was all that could be desired. It was significant that the lease of this Crown land to the Duchess was obtained at the instance of Lord Godolphin, who seems to have acted as intermediary between the Duchess and the Queen. It was a narrow strip of land, and whilst the house was building a new lease was granted for a term of fifty years of part of a leafy retreat known as the Royal Garden, which at that time extended east as far as the present Carlton House Terrace. If the Duchess had felt confidence in Vanbrugh she would have asked him to furnish the design for Marlborough House, but she had already come to the conclusion, by watching his work at Blenheim, that he was dilatory and opinionated, so she put the proposal before Sir Christopher Wren,

whose design for the palace, to her regret, had been set aside. The great architect of St. Paul's Cathedral was then an old man of seventy-seven, but his hand had not lost its cunning. Marlborough House was his last architectural work of any moment, and its design shows the simplicity and dignity, as well as the regard for comfort, which marked all his domestic architecture. It has been greatly altered since his time, and an upper story has been added to the house that he designed for the Duchess. It was a copy in some respects of the Duke of Buckingham's town-house, and was originally a two-storied mansion facing the Mall, surmounted with an ornamental balustrade and with niches containing allegorical figures.

The foundation-stone was laid, without any ceremony, by the Duchess on the 24th of May, 1709, and she watched the rapid progress of the building with evident satisfaction. The bricks for it were brought from Holland by the ships which carried reinforcements and ammunition to the Duke in Flanders. She wanted twelve thousand Dutch tiles for the adornment of its walls, and wrote to the Duke concerning them; but he, busy with great affairs, had not leisure to carry out her instructions. The house was finished by midsummer, 1711, and from that time onwards was a favourite residence of the Duchess. The Duke appears to have taken little interest in the scheme. His heart was set on Blenheim, which Vanbrugh promised was to rival Versailles. He was buying costly mirrors for it, and ordering the magnificent tapestry which still adorns its state apartments. He told the Duchess to remember that her "new building scheme" was sure to cost "twice as much as at first proposed."<sup>1</sup> But when the building was started his mood relaxed, and so he wrote from Rotterdam in June, 1709:

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

“ I do wish you all happiness and speed with your building in London, but beg that that may not hinder you in pressing forward the building of Blenheim, for we are not so much master of that as of the other.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Godolphin took almost as much interest in the building of Blenheim as the Duke. He went constantly thither to urge forward its progress, and may almost be said to have constituted himself clerk of the works. In small things as in great, he sought continually to advance Marlborough's projects, and in the Duke's absence did his best to keep the peace between the impulsive Duchess and the sensitive architect. He loved to wander in the glorious park, and to take a brief respite from his official cares in the seclusion of the High Lodge. No man would have been a more welcome guest to Marlborough at Blenheim than Godolphin, but neither the master of the house nor his bosom friend lived to see the completion of the palace.

It is impossible to study the annals of Queen Anne's reign attentively without perceiving that, up to the year 1708, Marlborough was indebted to an extent that can scarcely be expressed to the unique position of the Duchess at Court. It may even be said that, until Harley joined forces with Mrs. Masham and made her a cat's-paw for his adroit overtures to the Queen, the ascendancy of the Duchess, in spite of passing disagreements with Her Majesty, was not seriously challenged. But the whole situation changed when the Duchess persisted in nursing her grievances, and Harley, through the influence of Mrs. Masham, got on to a confidential footing with the Queen. He disliked the Duchess, and fanned the displeasure of Her Majesty. He was shrewd enough to see that, so long as Godolphin remained Lord Treasurer, there was no chance whatever either to

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.



undermine the Churchill influence or to secure his own political advancement. He had never forgiven Godolphin and Marlborough for bringing about his own dismissal from the Ministry, and he was now busy with secret intrigues to break their power. He possessed what Godolphin lacked, the ability to ingratiate himself with the "stupidest woman in Europe," as Anne, with a touch of injustice, was described.

Godolphin, whilst always respectful and ever courtly in his attitude to the Queen, never hesitated on occasion to tell Anne plain truths. He had too much self-respect to allow the Queen to imagine—in critical moments, when his own cool, capable brain was of account to the nation—that her own fears and antipathies ought to represent the last word in a momentous decision. He was Her Majesty's responsible adviser, and ought, in common fairness, to have had no rival in matters political in the royal closet. Small wonder, then, if he resented the backstairs influence of Harley, who cannot be exonerated from playing a discreditable part. Harley had no right to court secret political audiences, and, if he had been a man of honour, he would have scorned to avail himself of the opportunities which Mrs. Masham, who was herself an ardent Tory, contrived for his advantage. Both Godolphin and the Duke lost prestige through these manœuvres, and neither of them was sufficiently alive to the change which had come over the nation. In other words, they did not realize the growing power of the House of Commons, or the fact that the polling-booths had to be reckoned with as well as the Court.

Charles II. at Whitehall, William III. at Hampton Court, were very different from Anne, whether at Kensington or Windsor; they wielded an authority which had since passed into abeyance. Moreover,

the masterful personality of William had in a sense overshadowed the real significance of the Revolution; it was only with a woman on the throne that the altered conditions brought about by that great upheaval began to assert themselves when votes were cast at a General Election. Godolphin and Marlborough had been trained in the traditions of the old order, and they were too old to get into living touch with the new movement. There is a significant sentence in one of the Duke's letters to the Duchess, written when her quarrel with Mrs. Masham was in progress. He says that if the new favourite is a "good weather-cock," then it seems to him it is "high time to leave off struggling, for nothing is worth rowing for against wind and tide—at least, you will think so when you come to my age."<sup>1</sup> If the strain was telling on the Duke, it was telling even more on Godolphin. Marlborough was abroad fighting his battles; he had a thousand matters to think of, and it was possible for him, therefore, to throw aside his anxiety concerning intrigues at Court. But Godolphin was on the spot, burdened with affairs of State, at the Queen's call, and yet not in her confidence, and compelled, from his devotion to the great soldier, to humour the Duchess, and at the same time, as best he might, to keep the peace with Mrs. Masham. He had also uneasy colleagues in the Cabinet, notably the Duke's own son-in-law, Lord Sunderland, who was rash, impulsive, and not at all to his mind.

The Battle of Oudenarde, and the bitter winter which succeeded it, reduced France to the verge of despair. Louis XIV. began to realize not only that he was old, and that his most renowned Marshals, one after another, had suffered defeat, but that the nation itself was reduced to the verge of bankruptcy

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. ii., p. 175.

by the exorbitant taxation which the war had occasioned. Hence, in the spring of 1709, Louis, well aware that the Dutch were scarcely less tired of hostilities than himself, opened—as he had done three years earlier—negotiations for peace with the States-General. France wanted to divide the Allies at that crisis, but Heinsius stood firm, and refused to entertain separate overtures. Louis, with his army shattered, and, as it seemed, with no further chance of raising the sinews of war either by fresh taxation or new loans, was compelled to acquiesce in this decision, and to make proposals, not to the Dutch alone, but to the Allies.

One of the most damaging accusations brought against Marlborough was that he was eager to prolong the war for his own advantage. The charge was first brought against him by the Tories, who were intent on driving him from power. It was the text of many abusive pamphlets, and it raised a great hue and cry in the country. It was a cruel slander, for nothing was more unjust; yet, like many other false statements before and since, it was repeated so constantly that it passed in process of time on to the page of history, where it has remained, wearing the semblance of unassailable truth. Happily for the Duke's reputation, it can now be shown to be false, by an appeal to the private letters which he wrote in 1709 from The Hague to the Duchess—letters which have remained too long in ambush. Two or three brief citations—all of them written in July—are perhaps enough. He speaks with pity of the country people who, because of the campaign, were suffering from want of bread, and adds significantly: "I would fain make an end of the war." He asks for the measurements of the state-rooms at Blenheim, which he was wishful to embellish, and then the contrast between the palace, which was being built

for him, and the existing situation of his own troops prompts reference to "the poor soldiers in the trenches up to their knees in dust." He adds that "the sight of them gives me the spleen to a degree that makes me languish for retirement." In another note this sentence occurs: "I hope this winter will put an end to this war, and that the Peace may last as long as we shall live."<sup>1</sup> All this shows that the Duke longed for quietude, and was not, as some have urged, playing a part. He certainly would not have written to the Duchess, in letters meant for her eyes alone, in such a strain if his wish to end hostilities once for all had not been sincere. He had won victories which had made his name feared in France, and respected in every part of Europe; and many passages have already been cited from his letters which conclusively prove that, next to the honour of England, nothing lay nearer to his heart than a few years of unruffled peace. But he was not the sort of man to want peace at any price, and least of all if it meant surrender to the claims of France. Torcy, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in France, went to The Hague on the 6th of May with the offer to the Dutch of all they wanted, provided they would break with the Allies, and it was then that Heinsius saved the situation. Marlborough was in England at the moment, discussing the prospects of peace with Godolphin, and hastened back immediately to Holland to strengthen the hands of the Grand Pensionary. He was accompanied by Lord Townshend as joint Plenipotentiary.

In a letter to the Duchess, dated the 25th of May, the Duke throws light on the Conference. He states that "negotiations had been at a breaking-point, because the Dutch, in opposition to Eugene and Count Zinzendorf, had raised difficulties about their Barrier. This had been got over, and now only Mons. de Torcy, acting for France, had to be considered."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Two days later he writes again, telling her that "the King of France, to whom Mons. de Torcy has now gone to refer the Preliminaries, must sign, unless he is obstinately resolved upon the ruin of his country."<sup>1</sup>

Foiled in his attempt with the Dutch, Torcy tried to enter into negotiations separately, first with the English and then with the Austrian Envoys—a sufficient proof that France, at all hazards, wanted to break the Grand Alliance. He even tried to bribe Marlborough,<sup>2</sup> but instantly found that he had made a grave blunder. Torcy, in a letter to Louis, had to confess that in diplomacy, as well as in arms, Marlborough had no equal. The Allies stood together and stipulated for the surrender of the fortified towns along the frontiers of Holland, Germany, and Savoy; Strasburg was to be restored to the Empire, Dunkirk was to be dismantled, and Newfoundland was to be ceded to England. France, moreover, was no longer to insist on either Italy or Spain for Philip, and was openly to recognize, as against the claims of the Pretender, the Protestant Succession to the Throne. Negotiations were abruptly broken off when the Allies made a further stipulation that Louis XIV. must use his own armies, if necessary, to bring about the abdication of his grandson in Spain.

It is plain that Marlborough considered that this last stipulation was more than flesh and blood could stand. He thought that the Allies were driving too hard a bargain, and declared that, if he were in the place of the King of France, he would "venture the loss of his country sooner than be obliged to join his troops for the forcing of his grandson." But his colleague, Townshend, was of another mind, and so were the Envoys from Vienna, and the harsh proposal was carried. Whilst negotiations were still proceed-

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires de Torcy*, i. 262; ii. 104-III.

ing, the Duke, writing on the 4th of June from The Hague, told the Duchess that everything was practically settled.<sup>1</sup> He thought that the condition of France was such that it must submit to the terms. He had already requested her to send over a "canopy and chair of state in view of the Peace." "It is resolved that nobody shall take the character of Ambassador until the day we sign."<sup>2</sup> It is perfectly clear that the Duke felt that peace was a foregone conclusion, and no evidence can be produced to prove that he was not doing his best to secure it. He even began to arrange with Godolphin for the return of the troops. But the Allies had overreached themselves. They had wounded to the quick the pride, not merely of Louis, but of the French people. The King appealed to the patriotism of his subjects. The French are a chivalrous race, and they rose to the occasion. Madame de Maintenon gathered up the situation in a phrase—"The news brought by Torcy," she wrote on the 3rd of June, "fills everybody who has a drop of French blood in his veins with indignation."<sup>3</sup> Men who had hitherto been laggards in war sprang to arms, and others, imitating the example of the nobility, who sent their silver plate to the Treasury, contributed money. A wave of indignant enthusiasm swept over the country, and the outcome was that Louis was able to place Marshal Villars, the only soldier of supreme rank who had not suffered defeat in the war, at the head of an army of 90,000 men.

Marlborough immediately quitted The Hague, and, with Prince Eugene, prepared to meet him. In a letter to the Duchess on the 24th of June, he says:

"I do by this post send to the Lord Treasurer a copy of the King of France's letter in which he gives

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> A. Geffroy, "*Lettres Authentiques*," ii. 207.

reasons to his people for having refused agreeing to the Preliminaries, so that we may now be sure we must make this campaign."<sup>1</sup>

He made it to some purpose by seizing strategic points on the Scheldt and by the capture of Tournay. Godolphin, whilst the siege was in progress, worried almost to death by the captious attitude of Parliament towards everything that concerned the prosecution of the campaign, wrote from Windsor, in August, to Marlborough:

"I wish, as you do, that the whole House of Commons took their turn at the citadel of Tournay. I am apt to believe they would be much tamer creatures when they came back again."

Marlborough had expressed the wish that some of the people who did the talking would take a hand at the fighting. His patience was wellnigh exhausted by the constant attacks which were made upon him in newspapers and pamphlets.

Tournay had been fortified by Vauban, and was regarded as impregnable. Its fall startled the Court, for the great fortress on the Scheldt protected the French frontier. As soon as it fell, Marlborough crossed the French lines at a point where they were indifferently guarded, and, throwing his army over the River Haine, proceeded to invest Mons, the capital of Hainault. The march to Mons, a distance of fifty miles to the east, was accomplished by the Duke's army with almost incredible speed and without the loss of a single man. Whilst it was in progress, Villars heard that the Allies were in motion, and, throwing his army of nearly 100,000 men across the Duke's path, entrenched himself in a strong position and stood ready to give battle at Malplaquet, under cover of the thick woods which surrounded that place.

He was eager to measure swords with Marlborough,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

for the war had taken a new turn, and not only the honour but the existence of France was imperilled. Villars was unquestionably the ablest of all the Marshals of Louis XIV. Behind him was an army inspired by patriotic fervour. He was almost the only soldier of that epoch who seemed able to inspire the rank and file with enthusiasm. The French troops responded to him in the same way that the English did to Marlborough, and for the same reason—he considered his men. At his side were brave old Marshal Boufflers, the Chevalier de St. George, and twelve of the French nobility. Louis himself had expressed a wish, old as he was, to place himself at the head of the army, and die, if need be, in defence of his throne. He regarded as an intolerable affront the stipulation of the Allies in the terms which France had just rejected—that he should take up arms against his grandson in Spain. “If I must needs fight,” were his words, “I would rather fight my enemies than my own children.”

With Marlborough were Prince Eugene, the Princes of the Empire, and the majority of the brave officers who had borne the brunt of all the hard fighting up to what was destined to be the Duke's final battle. Marlborough had 90,000 men, tired and mud-stained by the arduous march. The French were working with their spades, throwing up entrenchments, almost until they went into action on the misty morning of the 11th of September. The battle began badly for the Allies, through a strategic blunder on the part of the Prince of Orange, who misunderstood his instructions and made a premature attack, only to be driven back to the Dutch, with heavy loss. Then the action became general, Prince Eugene leading on the right, and Marlborough on the left. The French were fighting largely under cover of the forest, and the advance of the Allies was hindered by marshes,



streams, fallen trees, and entrenchments. At one point in the battle there was great disorder in both armies, for the soldiers in the woods fell into confusion and were divided by the thickets. The slaughter on both sides was terrible. Prince Eugene's horse was shot under him, but he led the advance of the right wing on foot, waving his hat to the troops. The soldiers pressed on behind him, cursing the marshy, uneven ground and fallen trees, which threw them out of line. Every inch of the way was contested. The great tide of men tossed to and fro. No one could forecast the outcome of the fierce struggle.

In the thick of the action Villars was wounded in the knee, but he refused to be carried off the field, and, though in great pain, continued to direct the movements of the troops, until at last he fainted and was borne to the rear. By this time the French had been beaten back from their entrenchments and driven from the wood, and, though they still fought stubbornly, their centre had been weakened by the hurrying up of reinforcements to the point where Eugene was leading the attack. Napoleon Bonaparte used to say that there was a critical ten minutes in every battle which decided its fate. It had come at Malplaquet, and Marlborough took advantage of it. He moved his batteries forward and captured the redans; and the Prince of Orange, atoning for his initial mistake, cleared, by a charge of the Hanoverians, supported by the cavalry of the Allies, the open space in the forest where the fight was now raging. But the Allies had still to reckon with Marshal Boufflers, who at this moment brought up the French gendarmerie, and forced the Hanoverians inch by inch back to the entrenchments. But Marlborough fell upon them with the British and Hanoverian cavalry, only to be met by the French Household Cavalry, which charged with desperate valour and



broke his lines. The situation was saved by Prince Eugene, who galloped to his aid with the Imperial Horse; and the French, fighting desperately, slowly gave way. At that moment the Prince of Hesse put the squadron under his command against the French infantry on the right wing of Villars' army, and cut it off from the centre, and all was lost. Boufflers, now in command, sounded the retreat, and the whole French army fell back toward Bavay at three o'clock in the afternoon. They were beaten, but they had covered themselves with glory, and the Allies were in no position to take up the pursuit.

Villars' despatch to Versailles was no idle boast: "The enemy would have been annihilated by another such victory." Bolingbroke, long afterwards, described Malplaquet as a "deluge of blood." He spoke truly. It was the most bloody battle in the whole war, and, except from a few military students, has never received the attention which its importance merits. More men were slain at Malplaquet than at Blenheim, Ramillies, and Oudenarde, put together. It was the greatest pitched battle in which the French fought their best and yet were defeated; and Madame de Maintenon's letters show the consternation and panic which it occasioned at Versailles. The forest and the entrenchments served the French well at Malplaquet; their loss was 12,000, whilst the Allies, with no such cover, paid heavily for the victory with the blood of 20,000 men. Sixteen pieces of artillery and forty-six standards and colours were captured—amongst them the proud standard called *La Cornette Blanche*, which had been carried by the King's bodyguard into the action. The capture of this flag wounded Louis to the quick.

It is clear, from other letters written at this period to the Duchess, that Marlborough, though those at

his side little suspected it, was not merely restless, but ill. He complains of his sleeplessness, and adds that he is seized with giddiness whenever he attempts "anything considerable."<sup>1</sup>

When the battle was over, the Duke wrote to the Duchess, on the 11th of September, 1709:

"I am so tired that I have but strength enough to tell you that we have had this day a very bloody battle. At first we beat their Foot, and afterwards their Horse. God Almighty be praised, it is now in our power to have what Peace we please, and I may be pretty well assured of never being in another battle, but that nor nothing in this world can make me happy if you are not kind."<sup>2</sup>

He fell ill on the day after Malplaquet. He was, in truth, worn out by the fatigues of the campaign and his anxiety about affairs at Court. Moreover, being the most humane of soldiers, he was distressed at the terrible price of the victory. Three days later, though still weak and exhausted, he wrote again:

"I have every minute an account of the killed and wounded which grieves my heart, the numbers being considerable, for in this battle the French were more obstinate than in any other war. I hope and believe it will be the last I shall see, for I think it impossible for the French to continue the war."<sup>3</sup>

The Duchess, in her reply, complained that the Queen had not paid her any compliment over the Battle of Malplaquet. Her attitude had completely altered since Blenheim and Ramillies; after those great battles it seemed as if Her Majesty could neither do nor say enough to show her gratitude to the great soldier. It was surely significant as to the changed attitude of the Queen that her Majesty failed to send him the usual congratulations, though Malplaquet was

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. ii., p. 462

<sup>3</sup> Blenheim Papers.

probably the most difficult battle he had ever won. Now all this was altered, and it is clear, from the following note, written on the 3rd of October, that Marlborough winced:

"I do agree with you that Mrs. Morley might have taken notice to you of the victory, and have shown some concern for my being safe. If I do not mistake, it was much the same last year after the Battle of Oudenarde."<sup>1</sup>

Prince Eugene, in fairness it ought to be said, divided with Marlborough the glory of triumph at Malplaquet. A French officer who fought in that battle exclaimed, with a generosity which did him credit:

"What shall be able to stem the rapid course of those two famous heroes? If an army of 100,000 men of the best troops, posted between two woods, trebly entrenched and performing their duty, as well as any brave men could do, were not able to stop them in one day, will you not then own with me that they surpass all the heroes of former ages?"

The campaign ended with the surrender of Mons on the 9th of October, 1709. It left the Allies masters of Brabant and Flanders, and in command of the Scheldt.

"It is sometimes said that Marlborough fought Malplaquet, and wasted life unnecessarily there, in order to restore his waning popularity in England, but it must be remembered that in 1709 Mons was the last of the first-class fortresses belonging to the French, and the army of Villars and Boufflers the only real obstacle between Marlborough and Paris. Can anyone doubt that had Marlborough been well supported in England, the Allies would have been in Paris in 1710?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers, 19.

<sup>2</sup> "Europe, 1598-1715," by Henry Offley Wakeman, M.A. London, 1894.

But if Marlborough did not receive the thanks of the Queen, the two Houses of Parliament were not unmindful of that honour; and from far and wide, in spite of the growing detraction of the press and the coolness of the Court, came unstinted words of praise. France, beggared and exhausted, made renewed overtures for peace in the winter, but the Conference at Gertruydenberg came to nothing. It began on the 20th of March and ended on the 13th of July, when negotiations were suddenly broken off by France.<sup>1</sup> After the campaign, which ended with Malplaquet and Mons, Marlborough was ill-advised enough to ask the Queen to appoint him Captain-General for life—a request which was not granted, largely, there is reason to think, at the instance of Lord Somers.<sup>2</sup> It is not difficult to understand the Duke's reasons. He saw that the Whigs were losing power in the country; he knew that Mrs. Masham was gaining ascendancy at Court; he was perfectly aware that the Tories were opposed to him, and he seems to have foreseen that they were likely, in spite of all the blood and treasure that had been spent, to respond to the growing clamour of the populace by bringing about the conclusion of peace on discreditable terms. It is absurd to suppose that the Duke—he was aging fast, though he was only sixty—aspired, as the hireling press recklessly asserted, to the position of Dictator. It was even noised abroad that his real intention was to seize the crown in the event of the death in his lifetime of the Queen, who was already a martyr to gout. Marlborough had no son to succeed to his honours, and enough evidence

<sup>1</sup> For detailed account of what happened, see Matthew Prior's "History," edited by his executor, Adrian Drift. London, 1740. And also Dr. Somerville's "Great Britain during the Reign of Queen Anne." London, 1798. Pp. 386-390.

<sup>2</sup> Burnet's "History of His Own Time." Oxford, 1833. Six volumes. Note by Lord Dartmouth. Vol. i., p. 416.

has surely been accumulated in these pages to show, on the indisputable evidence of letters intended only for the eye of the Duchess, that the overmastering desire which he cherished for his declining years was personal tranquillity, and freedom from care, in the house at Blenheim, on which he had set his heart.

But his enemies were determined on his undoing, and the populace was caught by the hue and cry which they raised that the Duke, like Cromwell, meant to be Dictator of England. Marlborough never courted the crowd, and least of all the mob of gentlemen who write at ease. On the contrary, he disdained them, and they took their revenge. There are spots on the sun, and the scribblers of lampoons, ballads and pamphlets innumerable fastened their fangs on the weak side of a great reputation. He thought that he had done enough by his sword for the glory of England and the defence of its rights to dispense with the help of the pen. He never dreamed that a renown so hardly won could suffer even passing eclipse in the eyes of the nation, because men who spilt ink instead of blood found it to their advantage to decry his victories and misinterpret his motives.

The Duchess, by a strange irony, quite unconsciously helped to compass his fall. She pelted the Queen with letters, meant to be merely explanatory, but in reality tactless and railing. They did not move Her Majesty a hair's breadth, for the dominant quality in Anne was obstinacy. She replied that the Duchess seemed bent on the ruin of her "poor cousin," and charged her with "inveteracy" against Mrs. Masham. The Duke knew that no possible good could come out of such wrangles; on the contrary, he saw that they spelt disaster both at home and abroad; for by this time the disputes of the Queen and the Duchess were beginning to form the topic of lively comment

and of shrewd conjecture, not merely at The Hague and Vienna, but at Versailles. He told the Duchess that it was idle for her to write letters to Windsor, since it was perfectly clear that the Queen has "not the consideration she formerly had either for yourself or me." He added, in a letter written shortly before Malplaquet, dated the 26th of August, 1709:

"It has always been my observation in disputes, especially in those of kindness and friendship, that all reproaches, though never so reasonable, do serve no other end but the making the breach wider. There is a Power above which puts a period to our happiness or unhappiness, otherwise, should anybody eight years ago have told me after the success I have had, and the twenty-seven years' faithful services of yourself, that we should be obliged, even in the lifetime of the Queen, to seek happiness in a retired life, I should have thought it impossible."<sup>1</sup>

Unhappily, other forces were at work for the undoing of Godolphin and Marlborough. When the heather is dry, a stray match may set acres burning. Dr. Sacheverell, a theatrical clergyman of oratorical gifts and violent Tory principles, preached two sermons, one at Derby and the other in St. Paul's Cathedral, on the duty of non-resistance, which would have attracted, at best, but passing attention if Godolphin, nettled by a personal allusion, had not called the attention of Parliament to them, with the result that the noisy cleric was suspended for three years, and his obnoxious harangues were burned by the common hangman. It was a victory more costly than Malplaquet, for the Queen secretly, and the bulk of the nation openly, took sides with the pulpiteer. It gave Harley his chance, and Mrs. Masham fanned Her Majesty's disapproval. On the 8th of August, 1710, the Lord Treasurer, who had served the Queen so long, was at a moment's notice dismissed from

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct." p. 244.



office, with as little regard as if he had been a dishonest footman. Godolphin's downfall was ominous for Marlborough, and all the more as the Duke had made it plain that "all the honours and riches of the world would not now tempt him to take any part in a new Ministry." He felt proudly that his record was written; he did not desire to be entangled either in the cabals of the Court or in the intrigues of party. He told the Duchess that he intended to end his days with Godolphin and herself, and added: "If I can find mercy from the Almighty, I shall not envy any greatness at Court."<sup>1</sup> So matters stood in the fateful and uneasy summer of 1710, when the Tories came to power under Harley and St. John.

On the 8th of August the Queen announced the fact to Marlborough in the following letter:

" KENSINGTON,

" *August, 8, 1710.*

" My Lord Treasurer, having for some time shewed a great deal of uneasiness in my service, and his behaviour not being y<sup>e</sup> same to me as it was formerly, made it impossible for me to let him keep y<sup>e</sup> white staff any longer, and therefore I ordered him this morning to break it, which I acquaint you with now, y<sup>t</sup> you may receive this news first from me, and I do assure you I will take care y<sup>e</sup> army shall want for nothing."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Copied from original letter in Blenheim Papers; also cited by Coxe, iii., p. 124.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE HISTORIC QUARREL

"WE are living in a disagreeable age," Godolphin exclaimed in the year 1710. Marlborough was of the same mind. He told the Duchess:

"I have never during this war gone into the field with so heavy a heart as I do at this time. The present humours in England give me a good deal of trouble, for I cannot see how it is possible they should mend till everything is worse."

How came it that the Lord Treasurer at Court and the Duke abroad, after a war which had raised England to paramount influence in the councils of Europe, and brought the most powerful monarch that France had ever known to sue for peace, were in such a mood of dejection? Had Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, been fought in vain? History can give a proud answer to that question, but at the moment—a moment when England was invincible abroad—the great Minister, and the still more illustrious soldier who had humbled the pride of Louis XIV., suddenly realized that the foe within their own gates was conspiring with the help of the Crown to reduce them to impotency.

That is a statement which requires explanation. The Queen's attitude had altered; public opinion was uneasy; the nation was in peril of change. There were forces at work, subtle and deadly, which neither statesman nor soldier could control. When once suspicion invades the social and political atmosphere, no

man, however capable, however distinguished, can fight against it. It is easy to meet a frontal attack; no one knew that better than Marlborough. It is not difficult—as Godolphin had proved again and again in the cut and thrust of public controversy—to refute the accusations of political antagonists; but it is another matter to hold high posts of responsibility, whether at home or abroad, when slanders are whispered into the ear of the Sovereign, as well as circulated broadcast over the land.

It was openly stated, as already indicated, that Marlborough's request to be made Captain-General for life was but a veiled attempt to make himself Dictator. Wiseacres even declared that he intended to seize the throne on the death of the Queen, whose health was already broken. It was a ridiculous charge, for the Duke, apart from all else, was many years older than Anne, and, as his letters prove, his ambition at this time was for peace and quietness. How long the reign would last was on the knees of the gods, but so electric was the temper of the times, that if it was announced in the *Gazette* that the Queen had an attack of gout, everybody went about shaking his head, predicting the end, and next day, if she rallied, speaking of her as if she were immortal. The nation was divided into two camps—the Jacobites, who were intriguing, drank the health of "James III.," and were for the old order; and the adherents of the House of Hanover, who, for the most part, were less feather-brained and more substantial. Which cause would ultimately prevail no man could forecast. It looked ominously as if the Revolution settlement might at the last moment be set on one side, and, meanwhile, Whigs and Tories alike, Marlborough and Godolphin, Harley and St. John, were playing a deep game, for they did not know under which King they might be called to

serve. None of them, it is reasonable to believe, would have lifted a hand against Anne. They had won their laurels in her reign, and their personal devotion to her cannot be assailed. But the Queen's health was uncertain, and it looked as if after her would come the deluge, and the recognition of that fact explains, if it does not justify, the adoption by prominent men of a trimming policy at which Anne herself scarcely looked askance. The secret packet, indeed, which the Queen always wore, and which was thrown into the fire unopened by the Lords of the Council at her death, is believed to have contained her written desire that her subjects should offer the throne, not to her declared successor, but to her young brother, the so-called Pretender. Be that as it may, it is notorious that the Queen detested the idea of the succession of the House of Hanover, though she feared it was inevitable. It cannot, therefore, be wondered at that the men around her throne either cloaked or dissembled their real sentiments, and, as the years wore on, kept themselves in touch with both claimants to so splendid a heritage.

But, leaving so great a problem, it here becomes necessary to look back, in order to trace what in these pages is a matter of more concern—the chain of events which weakened and eventually shattered the power of the Whigs, and drove the Duke and Duchess from ascendancy at the Court of Queen Anne. It was nothing short of another “War of Succession,” the scene of which was not Flanders and Spain, but Windsor and Kensington.

The swift and dramatic turn of events in 1710 make it plain that the Whigs had lost the support of the Queen and the confidence of the country. Anne had always been in favour of a Coalition Government, and in the earlier years of her reign Godolphin's Ministry had fulfilled that condition; but the Whig element in

it had gradually triumphed, and when Harley and St. John, as well as Nottingham, were thrown out of office, the Tory influence declined. The Queen feared the supremacy of the Whigs; they stood for principles to which, at best, she gave but a lukewarm assent. Her heart was with the Tories, and they had ceased to count with Godolphin, who, though of that party at the outset, had gradually veered over to the Whigs, and since 1708 had thrown in his lot with them. Somers and Sunderland, both of whom were members of the Junta, now represented the Whigs in Godolphin's Ministry. Lord Somers was President of the Council, and Lord Sunderland Secretary of State. Both were ardent Whigs, and, before they joined Godolphin, had been thorns in his side. Somers was a great lawyer, a master of persuasive reason, cool, diplomatic, and well versed in foreign affairs. He was almost the only man of his party who had the Queen's ear. Sunderland was brilliant, impetuous, and unbridled of speech. The Queen fought against his admission to the Cabinet with great tenacity, and only yielded because the Duchess of Marlborough made an impassioned plea on behalf of her favourite son-in-law. She disliked Sunderland because of his republican sentiments, of which he made no secret even in the royal closet, his overbearing manners, his brusque and autocratic speech, and she regarded him, moreover, as a dangerous free-thinker, ready to champion all the causes which she detested.

Harley, in his secret audiences with the Queen, lost no opportunity of deepening her fears. He knew how to shake his head solemnly, when to sigh, and when to throw up his hands. He was a master of adroit insinuation, and, as the Queen did not doubt either his shrewdness or his wisdom, every tea-table interview confirmed her apprehensions. But behind Sunderland stood the Duchess, and the Duchess

meant the Duke, and the question of an inglorious Peace, or war carried to the gates of Paris—a climax to his victories which Marlborough already saw within his reach. It is idle to suppose that the Duke desired the war for his own advantage. He had had enough of glory; all he longed for in the personal sense was release from the tremendous strain imposed upon him. But Marlborough was opposed to England making terms with Louis XIV., which would reduce the Grand Alliance to a byword. England was bound by treaties, and he would be no party to setting them aside. It was not personal ambition which made him desire the post of Captain-General for life; all he wanted was to be in the saddle until the War of the Spanish Succession had been brought by force of arms to a triumphant conclusion. He saw clearly enough that the temper of England was changing, but he wished to hold the Queen and the nation to the great task both had undertaken, until by the magic of his sword the balance of power had been altered, and the inordinate claims of France were crushed beyond hope of recovery. Harley was of another mind. His ambition was peace at any price, and with this in view he held that the power of the Churchills must be broken.

Swift, though an implacable enemy of Marlborough, admits that the Duke at this time was not merely the greatest subject of the Queen, but, as he puts it, the "greatest subject in Christendom," yet the Court began to heap indignities upon him. His wishes with regard to preferment in the army had hitherto been always respected by the Crown, but now they were openly flouted. The Queen appointed Lord Rivers, a Whig whom Harley had won over to his own side, to the Lord-Lieutenancy of the Tower without consultation with the Duke, who had intended the post for a more distinguished peer. On the heels of this

rebuff came a serious slight. The death of the Earl of Essex rendered vacant the colonelcy of one of the most distinguished regiments in the service. The Duke wished to confer this coveted post on an officer named Meredyth, who had won renown in the war. But the Queen commanded him to give the regiment to Colonel Hill, a soldier whose claims were vastly inferior, and who, moreover, would never have occupied it if he had not been the brother of Mrs. Masham. Hill, apart from the circumstance that he was so closely related to the woman who had done her best to supplant the Duchess, had no claims to such a promotion. The Duke, in an audience with the Queen, told her that such an appointment would "set up a standard of disaffection," around which all the malcontent officers in the army would rally. He recalled to Her Majesty his own great services, and begged her to alter her instructions, and not force upon him so unreasonable a demand. The Queen received his expostulations with unwonted coolness, and adhered to her resolution.

The Duke and Duchess retired to Windsor Lodge, but not before they had placed Lord Somers and other of the Whig statesmen in possession of the facts. Godolphin at this crisis acted with vacillation; it was left to Somers, who was on a better footing with the Court, to make an energetic and dignified protest. The Duke had drawn up a letter to the Queen, in which he said, with the candour of a soldier, that matters had come to such a crisis that "I hope your Majesty will either dismiss Mrs. Masham or myself."<sup>1</sup> Sunderland and others wished him to send it, but Godolphin and Somers judged it too violent, and pleaded for delay. Somers played the part of peacemaker. He requested an audience, and when it was granted told the Queen that the eyes of all Europe

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 8.

were fixed upon the Duke, and that everywhere abroad he was regarded as one who was honoured with Her Majesty's absolute confidence. He assured the Queen that, if she gave heed to proposals for advancement in the army without consulting the Duke, the outcome would be disastrous. Every officer looked to the Commander for advancement, and if his recommendations were set aside there would be an end to all discipline. The Queen contented herself by saying that she had a full and lasting sense of the Duke's long and great services, and if people attempted to do him an ill office, their malice would recoil on themselves. Then she added stiffly: "I hope the Duke will not deem my proposal unreasonable." Sunderland was furious, and proposed to call the attention of Parliament to such a high-handed proceeding. But the Duke declared such action would be an insult to the Crown. In the end Somers and Godolphin persuaded Marlborough to throw aside his first letter, and write another in which, whilst making a dignified protest against the influence of Mrs. Masham in a matter which lay entirely outside her province, he did not press for her dismissal. Before this letter reached the Queen's hands, she yielded to the resolute attitude of her Ministers, fearful lest, if she persisted, Sunderland would carry out his threat and bring the matter before Parliament. She wrote a short note to the Duke, stating that she would not press for the promotion of Colonel Hill, and his original suggestion was, in consequence, adopted. When Marlborough next appeared at Court, Anne smothered him with compliments, and shortly afterwards sent him abroad to resume the campaign.

It was at this juncture that the ill-advised trial of Dr. Sacheverell, to which passing allusion has already been made, took place at the instance of Godolphin, who allowed himself to be nettled by a pointed allu-



sion to himself in the preacher's wild harangue. The man was at best a contemptible creature, not worthy of powder and shot, and the Whigs made a fatal mistake when they resolved upon his impeachment. The charge against Sacheverell was based on a sermon preached before the Lord Mayor in St. Paul's Cathedral on the 5th of November, 1709. It was immediately published, and had an extraordinary sale as a pamphlet, entitled "The Perils of False Brethren both in Church and State." It was a violent tirade against the principles of the Revolution, the Dissenters, and the Whig Ministry. The trial took place in Westminster Hall, and lasted three weeks. Several of the Bishops, and notably one or two of the Royal Chaplains, surrounded the defendant. This in itself was a proof of the sentiment which prevailed at Court, but, if anything more was needed to reveal it, Her Majesty's presence during the proceedings spoke for itself.

Dr. Sacheverell was not heroic; he was merely a feather-brained clergyman; but prosecution made him a popular hero. He was not a saint, but the mob regarded him as a martyr. If he had been let alone, his cheap rhetoric would have died down like the foam of the sea. As it was, the Whigs made him the precursor of the storm which swept them from power. Every day his coach from the Temple passed through the streets amid the plaudits of the people. He was prayed for in many of the churches as one who was suffering for righteousness' sake. The Queen's chariot, as it slowly made its way through the throng to Westminster, was greeted with the cry: "God bless your Majesty! We hope your Majesty is for High Church and Sacheverell." The excitement ran through the country; in every market-place there were angry wrangles; it was feared that the conventicles would be attacked.

The Doctor was found guilty by a bare majority of six, and was ordered to abstain from preaching for three years. The sentence was regarded as tantamount to an acquittal, and the rejoicings which followed all over the kingdom provoked riots of an alarming kind. The Duchess's friend, Dr. Hoadly, who was the champion of the Low Church party, was burnt in effigy. The High Church had triumphed, and the Queen was with them—a circumstance which stood revealed when Her Majesty, at the first opportunity, conferred the rich city living of St. Andrew's, Holborn, on the man who had publicly attacked her Ministers.

The Duchess appears to have regarded Sacheverell as a pulpit mountebank, a man to be dismissed with contempt. But she doubted the wisdom of the trial, and, like Godolphin, was chagrined at its result, and all the more since the Duke wrote telling her that the "commotion in England was doing great hurt." The outcome of Dr. Sacheverell's trial, so far as the Court was concerned, was to identify the Queen openly with the High Church party, to gain for her the enthusiastic devotion of the Tories, and to advance Harley and Mrs. Masham in favour. The Duchess had her own circle of friends, and, chilled by the mystery and constraint which pervaded the Court, began to be more in their company. Stung by the studied coolness with which she was now always met, she told Her Majesty that she proposed to be in attendance only so far as the duties of her office required. She kept her word, and was much at Windsor Lodge, St. Albans, or Woodstock, to the great content of Mrs. Masham, and apparently to the satisfaction of the Queen. Godolphin grew uneasy, for he felt that as long as the Duchess held her own, and was constantly on the scene, it was still possible to checkmate the backstairs influence which threatened the downfall of the

Ministry; but neither his expostulations nor those of the Duke, to whom he appealed, were of much avail.

One of the few men who had the absolute confidence of the Duchess was Arthur Maynwaring, M.P., who held the post of Auditor of Imports from 1705 until his death in 1712. Maynwaring, who was born in 1668, was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, and was a barrister of the Inner Temple. He edited the *Medley*, a journal in the Whig interest, to which Addison, Steele and Garth contributed. Swift did not relish what he called their "little barking pens," and declared that they were "always mauling" Harley, Bolingbroke, and himself. Maynwaring attacked Sacheverell, scoffed at Mrs. Masham, and defended Marlborough. He had a mocking spirit, a lively fancy, the art of putting things, and no lack of political courage.

"It is no wonder," he wrote, "that in all ages princes have been inclined to reward flatterers, since it would have been a sad thing for them to have the truth plainly told, which is almost the only thing in the world which has never been bought or sold."<sup>1</sup>

He recognized Marlborough's greatness, and was better acquainted with the secret history of his undoing than almost any other man in public life; and if he had possessed the Duke's confidence to the extent which he had that of the Duchess, he would have rendered him far more service with his caustic pen than, as matters stood, was in his power. He makes it plain that, as late as the year 1709, Queen Anne frankly admitted that "nothing had been done right in her reign to which the Duchess of Marlborough had not 'chiefly contributed.'"<sup>2</sup> Marlborough and Godolphin were no match for Harley and St. John when public opinion had to be turned by the political pamphlet. They believed in deeds, not

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

words, and sat lightly to the new force which had arisen in the nation through the growth of the press. Godolphin's attitude to Swift threw that incomparable master of political ridicule into the opposite camp, and Marlborough's reticence toward Maynwaring placed one of the ablest writers of his time at a disadvantage. Many a mischievous lie could have been nailed, like a false coin, to the counter, if the Whigs had grasped more promptly the power of the press. Swift and other brilliant writers were in close communication with Harley and St. John, and they brought all the resources of argument, invective, and irony, to bear with lightning speed on the changing aspects of the situation. The Whig writers, on the contrary, were for the most part more leisurely and not as well informed. They did not hit the nail on the head so adroitly, nor did they drive it home with such telling effect.

Maynwaring, in a letter to the Duchess after Sacheverell's trial, gives a glimpse of what was passing at that time:

"Plato says that the best possession any Prince can have is the familiarity of those who will not flatter. If this be true, what a sad case is the Queen in, surrounded with flatterers and liars, and at enmity with the only person who ever told her the truth. Nobody can say that Queen Anne is a philosopher."<sup>1</sup>

His letters are full of lively rattle. He tells the Duchess that people grow so warm about Dr. Sacheverell as to lose all self-control. One prominent officer, whose name was before the world, proposed at a dinner the toast "Confusion to Sacheverell," and, because a man who was present refused to drink it, he tossed the upraised glass of wine in his face, whereupon there was a pretty quarrel. People who held the opposite view were just as violent. A parson at

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

Worcester quarrelled with a Scots pedlar in an ale-house for refusing to drink the Doctor's health, and, after bandying words with the fellow, demanded satisfaction. They accordingly went into a room to box it out, but the pedlar proved more than a match for the parson, and made him cry for quarter. Maynwaring's comment is both amusing and shrewd:

"These were very fit persons to engage in the quarrel of such a fellow, and the ale-house was a proper place of battle. But that a whole nation should run mad and fight in such a cause is a frenzy that never had a parallel."<sup>1</sup>

He is angry because the Duke seems powerless to rid the Court of Abigail, and expresses indignation that a soldier who had won seven battles "cannot remove a chambermaid from the Queen," even though she was betraying both the Throne and the nation. He declares that military critics deemed Oudenarde the most extraordinary battle which Marlborough had fought,

"because the enemy were attacked in their march, which shows more the abilities of a General than forcing a camp. If the Duke can follow up his victories by securing peace, it will be as impossible for his enemies to hurt him as for the winds to blow down Mr. Vanbrugh's walls at Woodstock, where I hope your Grace will long enjoy all the happiness and prosperity that was ever known in life, and that the greatest cares you will ever feel again will be how to hang up your pictures and adjust your furniture."<sup>2</sup>

We find Maynwaring rebuking the Duchess because she had written a letter in the spleen, in which she declared that she wished herself drowned. He assured her that in his opinion she is the most fortunate woman in the world. "Your conquests here are almost as great as your lord's in Flanders, but, for God's sake, madam, come to town immediately, and

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

believe that it will make your friends still more happy." He returns more than once to this point, as this citation from an undated letter makes plain:

"To-day I met Lord Manchester, who is full of the common complaint that you are not more with the Queen, upon which I told him the story of the bed-chamber woman. This changed his opinion, but it is not strange if those that depend wholly on the Duke of Marlborough and the Lord Treasurer think themselves undone if you are not at Court."<sup>1</sup>

In another letter, written early in 1710, he again takes up his parable on the subject:

"If you keep your post and your ground at Court, it will make the Whigs strong and satisfied. They trust you, and think themselves obliged to you, and though two or three that you know personally may not have made the returns that are due, 'tis only because they are not naturally good men. But the party honours you, and think they have no other support, and those that never saw you are uneasy and grieved when you are absent from Court."<sup>2</sup>

He ends by appealing to her sense of humour, telling her that she ought to do the duty of her place, and for the rest "laugh at the Queen's folly." All through these letters Maynwaring stands revealed as a master of adroit compliment, and even out of a scrap of literary gossip noised about the town he makes capital:

"The Bishop of Salisbury (Dr. Burnet) is daily writing a History of his own Times, which everybody will read when he is dead, and if he had any sense of gratitude he will mention you with more respect than any person in it."<sup>3</sup>

But the main burden of his letters just then was that the Duchess, even if she took little concern in what was passing, must, though it might be irksome, keep herself in evidence at Court:

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"If you would have Madam Abigail and Squire Harley delighted, and all the insects that live by the warmth of their favour crawl again out of their holes, in which they were half starved and dying, then leave the Queen's bedchamber open to them. But if you wish security to your friends, happiness to the nation, success in war, or the blessing of a peace, remember you are still Groom of the Stole."<sup>1</sup>

He went in fear of Abigail, he laughingly declared, for writing ballads against her.

When the Duchess told Maynwaring that she thought that the King of France would not confess himself beaten without fighting another pitched battle, in spite of all rumours to the contrary, he laughed away her apprehensions by exclaiming: "There is no more likelihood of that than there is of the Queen's hanging Abigail."<sup>2</sup> Sometimes Maynwaring seeks to divert the Duchess, in her self-chosen seclusion at Windsor Lodge, by pushing aside the political curtain. Here, for instance, is a description of a reception at Lord Godolphin's:

"Some are musing, others whispering, some walking about the room, others leaning against the wall, and when his door opens, presently all cast their eyes that way, and if nobody comes out at last but Will the butler, there is a strange damp upon their countenances, yet many of them do not fail of making profound reverences to him. When my Lord Treasurer himself comes out they all crowd about him, press to be heard, and stick close to his ear until he is gone into the Court."<sup>3</sup>

He amused the Duchess by telling her that a certain French historian, in speaking of the brilliant Court of Francis I., had censured that monarch because he had made his palace every night the resort of the most beautiful women and all the men of wit and distinction in the kingdom:

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"If that man had lived to see our Court, he would have applauded the Queen's prudence in that particular, who never willingly draws any of her nobles from their seats, but seems to think her Court wants no further decoration, when it is set off with those shining lights the Scotch Doctor (Arbuthnot) and —Abigail."<sup>1</sup>

When the quarrel between the Queen and the Duchess was at its height, Mrs. Masham grew uneasy. She knew that she had made a false step when she induced the Queen to demand a regiment for her brother. High talk ran through the town on that occasion, and some of Marlborough's indignant officers drank "Damnation to Mrs. Masham." She dreaded the wrath of the Duchess, and wrote in consequence, to borrow Her Grace's phrase, a letter of protestation. It was her greatest misfortune, she declared, to be under Her Grace's displeasure. She added that she had done her best to keep back all knowledge of this from the world, and ended with the plea: "I cannot restrain the tongues of malicious people." Unfortunately, she made no attempt to do so. The Duchess chanced to come across this effusion in her old age, and on the back of it wrote the following comment: "This letter, so full of a good conscience, was writ to me by my Lady Masham after she had done me so much mischief. 'Tis, I think, the style of her master Harley."<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Masham was a mere puppet in Harley's hands. He turned her head with his attentions, and gleaned from her lips all that was passing in the Queen's mind.

The position of the Duchess in the spring of 1710 was intolerable. Godolphin, states Maynwaring, did not conceal his opinion even to the Mistress of the Robes that in her quarrel with the Queen both of them might possibly be a little in the wrong.<sup>3</sup> Godolphin, Sunderland, Somers, were imploring her on public

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



grounds to keep on good terms with the Queen, and yet not merely her conduct, but her motives, were assailed.

“Every action, every word—nay, every look of her face—was misrepresented, and painted in the most odious colours. If she declar’d her mind with her usual frankness, and did not immediately give up her opinion, without conviction, it was unpardonable boldness and disrespect; if she declined entering into controversy, it show’d her contempt of Her Majesty’s understanding, and belief of the superiority of her own. If she stay’d at home, as she often did, for two or three days, and was not seen at Court, it was a gross failure of duty, and slight of her Sovereign. If she came thither, and not conscious of any mis-demeanour, or suspicious of any ill practices against her, did not fawn like a spaniel, but behaved on the same foot of friendship as she had been desir’d, it was inexcusable insolence. If she spoke against passive obedience and Non-Resistance, and declar’d for the rights of the subject, she was a Republican, and if she open’d her mouth against a scandalous Peace, she delighted in war.”<sup>1</sup>

The words just cited may almost be claimed as contemporary evidence, for they were written early in the reign of George II., and occur in a well-written anonymous pamphlet of a hundred pages, being the first attempt which was made in print to describe a great career.

There comes a point in human endurance beyond which it is impossible to pass if self-respect is to be maintained, and the knowledge that “malicious people” were making havoc of her reputation, not merely at St. James’s, but in every Court in Europe, led the Duchess to determine to bring matters to an issue. For more than a quarter of a century she had been honoured with the confidence of Anne, as

<sup>1</sup> “The Life of Her Grace Sarah, late Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough,” p. 51. London 1745.

Princess and Queen, and, apart from a boldness of speech which she had never disguised, and which her royal mistress had, until recently, always encouraged, she was conscious that amid all the strain of difficult and responsible service she had done nothing to justify the treatment which she now received. She could afford to laugh at what she called Grub Street stories, which were industriously circulated by her enemies in pamphlets or broadsheets, since they were palpably inspired by ignorance and envy, as well as malice. But when she was accused of having treated the Queen at the trial of Dr. Sacheverell with disrespect, a charge which was as ridiculous as it was untrue, and absurd stories were put about concerning her relations at the Court, she felt bound in honour to seek an opportunity to vindicate herself from such aspersions, and all the more so since it was within her knowledge that the Queen had allowed such scandal to pass unrebuked.

The Duchess therefore asked for a private audience, a request which; in view of her position and services, it might be imagined Her Majesty would instantly have granted. To her surprise, Anne twice refused this proposal, and intimated that, if she had anything to say, she might impart it by letter. Harley by this time, though he had no official standing at Court, was in constant touch with the Queen. He had been given a key which gained him admission unobserved from Windsor Park to a small house below the Castle, where the Queen spent much of her time, ostensibly because it had been a place of retreat for Prince George in his last days. In this way he came and went to Windsor without the world hearing so much as a whisper of his movements. When Anne was at Kensington, Mrs. Masham's ingenuity enabled him to climb the backstairs undetected. Matters had come to a pretty pass when the Sovereign lent

countenance to such intrigues behind the back of her responsible advisers, and be it remembered that, outside a narrow clique at Court, the Mistress of the Robes was still regarded at home and abroad as the real, though perhaps imperilled, power behind the Throne.

She made no secret of the motive which prompted her request for a private audience. She told the Queen that, whilst she was not prepared to state in writing what she had to say, it concerned the slanders which had been put in circulation, and she added, with a candour which she had good reason afterwards to regret, that her statement was not of a kind which would compel an answer. Anne had scarcely received this letter before the Duchess, who could bear the suspense no longer, took coach to Kensington Palace, and requested the Page-in-Waiting to inform the Queen of her presence. She had purposely chosen the hour when she knew Her Majesty was least engaged, and she sat down, she tells us, in a window of the long gallery outside the private apartments, "like a Scotch lady with a petition, instead of a trusted and lifelong confidant."<sup>1</sup> There she remained for an inordinate time, hazarding the probably correct conjecture that the Queen meanwhile was in deep consultation with Mrs. Masham. The light was slowly fading. It was the evening of the 6th of April, 1710, and just as darkness fell the door of the royal closet was thrown open, and the Duchess entered.

There is scarcely an incident in the annals of the Throne which has been more often described than the historic interview between Queen Anne and the Duchess of Marlborough. Almost every writer has brought imagination into play in its recital, and with scarcely an exception has employed it to the disadvantage of the Duchess. She has been represented

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

as a haughty, domineering, angry woman, who swept into the presence of her meek and long-suffering Sovereign in order to assail her with reproaches. The truth is, the Duchess sought the Queen in another mood, and, though words ran high before the audience ended, they were occasioned by Her Majesty's provoking and sullen obstinacy. It was no sudden pique that moved the Duchess, though she afterwards said it was "industriously spread about the town that I had gone in upon the Queen, and surpriz'd her in her closet with all the rudeness imaginable." That in itself was a slander, for the keys of office were dangling at her waist. If she had chosen, she might have gone directly to Her Majesty by virtue of her post, without ceremony, instead of waiting, like some poor lady with a petition. Her aim was simply to know exactly where she stood with the Queen. She wanted, in other words, to find out—and no one in the world knew better how to detect what was really passing in Anne's mind—whether Her Majesty believed the absurd stories that were afloat to her discredit. She was in the position of a trusted servant of the Crown, whose reputation had been besmirched by slanderous tongues, and, conscious of her own integrity, she wished to clear herself. This she desired, not for her own sake alone, but because she knew full well that, so long as her footing at Court was uneasy, Lord Godolphin was placed at a disadvantage, and the Duke, with a still more tremendous strain upon his brave shoulders, was confronted by disquieting rumours, which damaged his influence abroad.

There was a lull before the storm. The Queen looked up quickly as the Duchess entered, and exclaimed that she was just about to write to her. The Duchess, instead of "displaying all the rudeness imaginable," which was afterwards attributed to her, pro-

tested that she had not come to solicit the return of Her Majesty's favour, but merely to clear herself of the charges which had been brought against her, and which she proceeded to state. Instantly the Queen's manner hardened. She interrupted the Duchess curtly, "Whatever you have to say, you may put it in writing," which in itself was a harsh rebuff to one who had shared her every thought and guided her affairs with discretion. The Duchess attempted to explain how matters stood, but was again and again interrupted with the same words: "Whatever you have to say, you may put it in writing." At this she assured the Queen that she had no desire to trouble her unduly, but added: "I cannot possibly rest till I have cleared myself from some particular calumnies with which I have been loaded." Her resolution prevailed for the moment, but the Queen, as if to show she was indifferent to anything she said, turned away her face. The Duchess said it was hard that there were people about the Court who had made the Queen believe that she had said things which she was no more capable of saying than of "killing her own children." Anne, startled by her vehemence, fell back on a commonplace: "Without doubt there were many lies told." The Duchess then begged, in order that she might make her innocence apparent, that Her Majesty would tell her the real grounds of offence. The Queen now fell back on her own letter, and reminded her that in seeking an audience she had said that Her Majesty would not be obliged to answer. The Duchess's subsequent comment on this subterfuge is perfectly reasonable. She declares that such words "did not at all imply that I did not desire to know the particular things laid to my charge," since it was impossible to refute accusations which were not disclosed. She told the Queen at the time that all she wanted was to get at the truth, and added that Her

Majesty need not reveal the names of those who had slandered her.

"I protested to Her Majesty," states the Duchess, "that I had no design in giving her this trouble to solicit the return of her favour, but that my sole view was to clear myself, which was too just a design to be wholly disappointed by Her Majesty."<sup>1</sup>

The Queen said nothing to this, but rose from her chair and moved towards the door. The Duchess followed her, with a renewed appeal for an explanation. Thereupon the Queen repeated more than once: "You desired no answer, and shall have none."<sup>1</sup> The Duchess, stung to the quick, broke into a storm of tears, and asked Her Majesty if in the long course of their friendship she had ever played her false. She declared that she was not conscious of having given offence in anything, except pressing upon the Queen matters which she deemed imperative for her service and security. She hinted further that she might still have been happy in the Queen's favour if she had dissembled her real opinion of men and affairs. The Queen seems to have relented for a moment, and the Duchess, on her own showing, with a "fresh" flood of tears and a concern sufficient to move compassion even where all love was absent, begged to know what other charges, beyond those which she had explained, rankled in the Queen's mind. At this Her Majesty's attitude hardened, and she fell back again on the words: "You have desired no answer, and you shall have none." Then, in a final appeal, the Duchess asked if Her Majesty did not know herself that she had often set aside self-interest in order to serve the Crown faithfully. Surely the Queen would at least admit that she was a woman incapable of disowning anything that she knew to be true.

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 241.

Anne's mood was relentless, and once more the passionate plea for fair-play was met with the chilling response: "You desired no answer, and you shall have none." Then the Duchess admits, in so many words: "I could not conquer myself, but said the most disrespectful thing I ever spoke to the Queen in my life, which was: 'I am confident your Majesty will suffer for such an instance of inhumanity.'" Anne's retort was: "That will be to myself." The Duchess adds, in the "Account of the Conduct,"<sup>1</sup> which was first published in 1742: "Thus ended this remarkable conversation, the last I ever had with Her Majesty." She adds, and the words do her credit: "The Queen always meant well, how much soever she might be blinded or misguided."

The Duchess quotes a letter written by the Duke on the 26th of August, 1709, when he was besieging Tournay. It shows that Marlborough even then realized that matters were rapidly approaching the breaking-point between the Queen and his wife:

"If anybody had told me eight years ago that after such great success, and after you had been a faithful servant, that in the Queen's lifetime we should be obliged to seek happiness in a retired life, I could not have believed that possible."<sup>2</sup>

Such treatment, after nearly thirty years of unwearied and devoted service, admits of no justification. The Duchess of Marlborough was clearly within her rights in desiring to know the accusations which had been brought against her, and the only supposition is that they were too trivial to be advanced. She would not have been human if she had accepted such harsh treatment without resentment, and she was very human, as her vivid

<sup>1</sup> "Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough," p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> "Account of the Conduct," p. 234.

little touch in one of her unpublished papers at Blenheim attests: "After I had come out from the Queen, I sat me down in the long gallery to wipe my eyes, before I came within sight of anybody."<sup>1</sup> The Queen's conscience was uneasy. A few days later she wrote asking the return of "all my strange scrawles, it being impossible that they can now be agreeable to you"<sup>2</sup>—a desire which was ignored by the indignant Duchess.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE FALL OF GODOLPHIN

THE quarrel between the Queen and the Duchess, though it did not immediately lead to the latter's dismissal as Mistress of the Robes, was sufficiently disquieting, not merely to the Duke, but to the great Minister who all through the storm and strain of the war had upheld his actions. Godolphin began to realize that not only his health, but his political power, was waning. He had lost the confidence of the Court, and was looked at askance by Whig statesmen in his own Cabinet. His prestige in the country was weakened by the growing ascendancy of Harley with the Queen, the taxation which rendered the war unpopular, and the attacks of the Press, which the Tories subsidized. The peace negotiations in the spring of 1710 at Gertruydenburg had failed. Louis XIV., old, disillusioned, and weary of war as he was, had still enough spirit to reject with scorn the proposal that he should assist in driving by force of arms his own grandson from the throne of Spain. The Dutch, moreover, had made inordinate claims, whilst Austria and Savoy were opposed to the only terms which France could accept. It was not expedient, therefore, even from Harley's point of view, to break openly with the Duchess, for the Duke held the key of the situation, and was the ruling spirit of the Grand Alliance. By the irony of fortune, his star was still in the ascendant in every Court in Europe at the very moment when, by a series of

cold and calculated rebuffs, all that malice could suggest was being done in England to weaken his position and chill his ardour.

The harsh treatment of the Duchess was immediately followed by the appointment of the Duke of Shrewsbury to the post of Lord Chamberlain. Godolphin was taken aback. He was the Queen's responsible adviser, and yet the decision was made over his head. Shrewsbury was no friend of the Ministry. On the contrary, he was in league with Harley, who was plotting against it. He could pay the Duchess elaborate compliments about the exploits of the Duke and her own services at Court, and at the same time intrigue against them. He was notoriously jealous of their son-in-law, Lord Sunderland, and bore him no good-will. Moreover, the "King of Hearts," the name by which he was known in society, because of his wheedling, attractive manners, was a man with a damaged record. It is true he was one of the seven noblemen who signed the invitation which brought William of Orange to the throne, and was made Secretary of State on the accession of that monarch. But Shrewsbury promptly quarrelled with Nottingham and Carmarthen, and was one of the first statesmen after the Revolution to attempt to overthrow it by making overtures to the Court of St. Germain's. He was, in truth, an arch-schemer, and was accused of being privy to the assassination plot. During the earlier years of Anne's reign he led a leisured life in Rome, and, having married his Italian mistress, now appeared upon the scene with his unprepossessing but ambitious Duchess, who cherished aspirations for the post of Mistress of the Robes.

Harley pretended to think that Shrewsbury's wide experience of affairs and cosmopolitan outlook would be of advantage to the Queen. The real motive of his appointment was to force upon the Godolphin

Ministry someone who was prepared to carry all that he could glean of its intentions to the Opposition. Godolphin wrote to Marlborough a letter in which he describes the audience at which the Queen made known her purpose. He states that Her Majesty reproached him about an anxiety which he did not attempt to conceal. The Queen declared that none of the Whigs had shown themselves as uneasy as himself in regard to the appointment. Godolphin replied that that arose from their desire not to embarrass public affairs at so great a crisis. He adds:

"We parted drily enough, but that I found that she had a mind to make me think that she did not design any other alteration, though I had told her the noise of the town ran very high on that subject."<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that Godolphin saw how the wind was blowing, and he ought to have resigned. It was an intolerable affront, and on all grounds it should have been challenged. He knew that the Tories had taken heart of grace since the trial of Sacheverell, and that, though, as he put it to Marlborough, he was toiling at the oar like a slave in a galley, the tide was running swiftly against him both at Court and in the country. He knew, moreover, that there was a powerful clique in his own party who wished him out of the way. He told the Duke that he had left no stone unturned to bring about a reconciliation between the Queen and the Duchess, but confessed that he was baffled. Glancing at the letter in which Godolphin's despair stood revealed, the Duchess in her old age, with unconscious irony, wrote upon it this comment: "Surely there never was any time since Adam that such a woman as Abigail gave so many great and good men so much trouble."<sup>2</sup> The words reveal her typical foible—whoever went wrong, she was a'ways in the right. If she had been

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

willing to admit, when the remorseless logic of facts was against her, that there were occasions on which she had been ill-advised, the story of her brilliant, honest, but wayward and imperious career would not have been so tragic.

It is not difficult to understand Godolphin's position, even though it be admitted he acted tamely. His nerves were shattered, and when that happens decision and spirit are commonly lacking. He was hoping against hope for some sudden turn of the wheel which might restore his authority, but beyond this was another reason. He was reluctant to quit office at a crisis when the Duke more than ever needed his aid, and nothing is more plain in his whole career than his admiration for Marlborough. It is easy to see now, in the light of all that quickly followed, that if Godolphin had played the man at that moment it would have been better for the Duke as well as for himself. His vacillation emboldened their common enemies, and hastened the downfall of one of the most brilliant Ministries which has ever held power in England.

The next step which revealed the Queen's displeasure with her Ministers was the sudden dismissal of Lord Sunderland on the 13th of June, 1710, from the post of Secretary of State. Sunderland had been more ardent than any other member of the Government for the prosecution of Sacheverell, and when that matter was out of the way Her Majesty, prompted by Shrewsbury, took her revenge. Anne's letter to the Duchess at this crisis is curious. It was written early in June, 1710, but is merely dated "Wednesday morning, 9 o'clock."

"I received your letter last night just as I was going to bed, to which I can say no more than what I did on that subject on my last confirming of that same opinion, only [except] that I have no thoughts of

taking the Duke of Marlborough from the head of the Army, nor I daresay nobody else. If he or you should do so wrong a thing at any time—especially at this critical juncture—as to desert my service, what confusion might happen would be at your doors, and you alone would be answerable and nobody else, but I hope you will both consider better of it. Yesterday in the afternoon Mr. Secretary Boyle came to me, and I then ordered him to go this morning to Lord Sunderland for the seals, which I think proper to acquaint you with before you hear it from other hands, and so let you know Lord Dartmouth is the person I intend to give them to, who I hope you will approve of.”<sup>1</sup>

It is plain that the Queen was now prepared to break with the Duke and Duchess at the first opportunity. Such an act was virtually a declaration of war against the Churchills. Anne knew perfectly well how the Duchess, especially after the stormy interview already chronicled, would interpret her son-in-law's dismissal. An uneasy conscience lurks in the letter which Her Majesty wrote to Godolphin, stating that she had ordered Mr. Secretary Boyle to demand the seal of office from Lord Sunderland. The Queen protests too much, and in one unguarded expression her secret intentions leap to light:

“I have no thoughts, nor I daresay nobody else, of taking the Duke of Marlborough from the head of the Army.”

Yet two months later Godolphin, who clung to her service more on patriotic than on personal grounds, was abruptly dismissed; whilst a year and a half did not slip uneasily away before Marlborough, who had carried her arms to victory in battles which shine in the annals of history, and had made her name illustrious in every Court in Europe, shared the same fate. It is impossible to exonerate Anne, not merely from harshness, but from the disgraceful charge of double-

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, “Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. iii., p. 90; but cited from original at Blenheim.

dealing, since all the world knows that at the moment when she wrote that letter to a great and sorely-tried Minister, who had served her with unwavering devotion, she was countenancing the intrigues which drove Godolphin from power, led to the dismissal of the Duchess, and culminated in the downfall of Marlborough.

Lord Somers, who more than any other of the Whig statesmen stood well with the Queen, tried in vain to shake her resolution about Sunderland. Anne was inflexible, though she volunteered the statement (it was quickly falsified): "I do assure you, I do not intend to make any further alterations." The Duke, in a letter to Godolphin, but meant for the Queen's eye, which arrived too late to prevent the dismissal of Sunderland, shows how greatly he chafed at the manner in which the Whigs seemed prepared to swallow this fresh affront. It was addressed to Godolphin, who was expressly told to read it to the Queen. He felt that the quarrel was being pushed so far that there must be an end of half-measures. He made it clear that he realized that Lord Sunderland had been singled out as the object of the Queen's displeasure for "no other reason than that of being my son-in-law." He added (the letter is dated June 20):

"I conjure you to use such powerful instances to the Queen that she may be sensible before it is too late that the request I now make is much more for hers and the public good than for any consideration of ease to myself. What I desire is that she would be pleased to defer the removal of Lord Sunderland till the end of this campaign, and then she may have the winter before her to take measures with the Allies for the command of this Army, on which, in a very great measure, depends not only the welfare of England, but of all Europe. This is what I beg, in reward of all my faithful services. If it must be otherwise,

and that nothing but my immediate retiring will content those that have at this time the power, I must submit with the satisfaction that everybody must be sensible of my readiness to have served—if it might have been allowed with honour.”<sup>1</sup>

Anne read the letter, and in returning it to Godolphin wrote, on the 13th of June:

“ I think the Duke of Marlborough’s pressing so earnestly that I should delay my intentions is using me very hardly. I hope both he and you, when you have considered this matter more calmly and impartially, will not wonder that I do not comply with his desires.”<sup>2</sup>

When this reply was communicated to Marlborough, he realized that matters had come to such a pass that, to borrow his words, “ the sooner the scabbard was flung away, the better.” He was annoyed, not only by the Queen’s attitude, but also by the apparent indifference to Sunderland’s fate which not a few of the Whig statesmen displayed. The nation at large, ignorant of the secret cabals which were at work, was at a loss to understand on what pretext Lord Sunderland had been removed. There was widespread consternation, and scarcely any political event in the reign created so great a sensation. A panic arose in the city, and public securities fell. The nation, so it was said, at the time was like a flourishing tree, full of blossoms. If the Ministry was changed, men declared it would be nipped like fruit by a north-east wind. In every Court in Europe controlled by the Grand Alliance there arose a sense of alarm. The Emperor Joseph I. made a dignified protest to the Queen:

“ Your Majesty cannot find amongst your subjects any who in Parliament could better second your

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, “ Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. iii., p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

generous intentions; or could serve you either in your councils or in the management of your armies with more zeal, fidelity, and universal approbation."<sup>1</sup>

He begged the Queen to continue a Ministry which had promoted the common cause to so signal a degree, and which had the confidence of Her Majesty's Allies.

The Queen was startled. She seems scarcely to have realized how closely foreign potentates watched political movements in England. It was imperative to allay such widespread alarm. She therefore instructed Mr. Secretary Boyle to write despatches in her name to her Allies, assuring them that their fears were groundless. They were told that it was Her Majesty's intention to continue the administration of affairs in the hands of the present Ministry, since the Queen had long experience of their abilities.

The Duke would assuredly have thrown up his command but for the appeal to his patriotism which was made at this crisis in the historic joint letter, dated the 14th of June, 1710, which was sent to him by Godolphin, Somers, Halifax, Newcastle, and other leading statesmen. They expressed their indignation that at a moment when he was hazarding his life in the service of his country, and the fate of Europe hung in the balance, he had been subjected to so great a mortification. They told him that if he quitted the service the Grand Alliance would be imperilled.

"We therefore conjure you by the glory you have already attained, by the many services you have done your Queen and country, by the expectation you have justly raised in Europe, and by all that is dear and tender to you at home, whose chief dependence is upon your success, that you will not leave this great work unfinished, but continue at the head of the Army."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Blenheim Papers.



The Emperor wrote to him a letter of remonstrance even more generous and not less emphatic. He told Marlborough that it would be fatal to the common cause if, in the midst of his triumphs and almost at the end of the war, he relinquished his military command.<sup>1</sup> The Duke's sense of duty, his loyalty to the Ministry, his devotion to the common cause, prevailed, and though, as he told Godolphin, he did not think that such a decision would save the political situation, he determined to remain at his post. Scarcely a month after Marlborough had formed this resolution Godolphin was dismissed.

The Duchess complicated the political situation by a long and angry letter to the Queen, in which she protested in vehement terms against Lord Sunderland's removal and the intrigues of Mrs. Masham. Her own relations with the Court had now wellnigh ceased, and, though not yet deprived of her position as Mistress of the Robes, she was no longer in attendance on the Queen.

Sunderland had scarcely been removed before the Queen surprised Godolphin by treating him with a consideration to which he had long been a stranger. Her Majesty knew perfectly well that, though the Ministry had lost ground in the country, no one could forecast what the result of a General Election might be. It was impossible, in short, to tell to what extent the influence of the Whigs had declined since the trial of Sacheverell and the failure of the peace negotiations. But Harley was by no means sure in July, 1710, whether the dismissal of Sunderland had not provoked a reaction in their favour, which, if an appeal were made to the nation, might again place the Lord Treasurer at the head of affairs. One thing was certain, and that was that, however Godolphin stood with the country, he had a powerful following in the

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 100.

existing House of Commons. It was this which led the Queen to act cautiously. She accordingly made a show of cordiality, and told him that she was in favour of what she called a moderating system, or, in other words, of carrying on the Government with the aid of statesmen of both parties. She even hinted to Godolphin, though in too vague a manner to allow of a reply, that a reconciliation between Harley and himself would be of public service. She next made Lord Shrewsbury the mouthpiece of her wishes. "Yesterday," wrote Godolphin to the Duke on the 12th of July, "the Lord Chamberlain told Lord Halifax that the Queen was resolved to make me and Mr. Harley to agree."<sup>1</sup> How this was to be brought about, Shrewsbury, though full of compliments, was too adroit to disclose. Anyhow, Godolphin, who was in the position of a drowning man catching at a straw, was relieved, and was even sanguine enough to believe that he had regained to some extent the Queen's confidence. Marlborough, however, had misgivings. The French were already beginning openly to boast that what they lost in Flanders was now balanced by what they were gaining in England.

Then suddenly the blow fell. Anne appears to have realized that the Whigs were so divided that she could act decisively. She saw also that a reconciliation between Godolphin and Harley was impossible without concessions to the Marlborough interest, which she was not prepared to make. Godolphin was abruptly dismissed on the 8th of August. The Duchess gives this account of the manner of it:

"The very day before the Lord Treasurer was put out he was two hours with the Queen, advising her with great respect and making the highest expressions of duty, offering to serve or not to serve as she

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 15.

pleased, or thought it for her interest, and in conclusion asked: 'Should I go on?' She readily answered: 'Yes.' He observed something strange and gloomy in her looks, but had not the least thought of what happened the next day, when he was removed in an unheard of manner for a man of that high station."<sup>1</sup>

Godolphin had left the Queen's presence with the distinct assurance from her lips that she wished him to continue in office, yet late that very night Her Majesty wrote him a letter which was handed to his porter next morning, and which ran as follows:

" KENSINGTON,  
" August 7th.

" The uneasiness which you have showed for some time has given me very much trouble, though I have borne it. Had your behaviour continued the same it was for a few years after my coming to the Crown, I could have no dispute with myself what to do. But the many unkind returns I have received since, especially what you said to me personally before the Lords, makes it impossible for me to continue you any longer in my service; but I will give you a pension of £4,000 a year, and I desire that, instead of bringing the staff to me, you will break it, which I believe will be easier to us both."<sup>2</sup>

Godolphin not merely broke the staff, but, according to the gossip of the town, threw the Queen's letter into the fire.

The time was not ripe for the dismissal of Marlborough. Anne wrote to the Duke, on the day when she removed the Lord Treasurer, in these terms:

" My Lord Treasurer, having for some time shown a great deal of uneasiness in my service, and his behaviour not being the same to me as formerly, made it impossible for me to let him keep the white staff any longer, and therefore I ordered him this morning to break it, which I acquaint you with now that you

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

may receive this news first from me, and I do assure you I will take care the Army shall want for nothing."<sup>1</sup>

Godolphin made a dignified and respectful reply to the Queen's message. He told her that he was not conscious of ever having uttered an undutiful word or of having been guilty of one undutiful act during all the years in which he had served the Crown. He claimed to have shown at all times "respect, zeal, and integrity." He had had the handling of millions of public money, but he quitted office so poor that, but for the prompt generosity of Marlborough and a small fortune which came to him shortly afterwards through the death of his brother, he would have been on the verge of actual want. The Queen never fulfilled her promise of the pension, and Godolphin had too much self-respect to remind her of it. With almost incredible meanness, the fallen statesman's son, Lord Rialton, who held a minor and quite unpolitical appointment at Court, was also dismissed. He probably would have been allowed to remain but for one reason. Like Sunderland, he was a son-in-law of the Duchess of Marlborough.

The fall of Godolphin meant the triumph of Harley. It was followed by a General Election, one of the most bitter and stormy which up to that time had ever been held in England. The Whigs received a crushing defeat, and from the autumn of 1710 to the end of the reign, four years later, the Tories were masters of the situation. Shrewsbury, Rochester, Ormond, and Harcourt, joined the new Administration, but the most brilliant member of it was Henry St. John, who, though the Queen personally disliked him, was appointed Chief Secretary of State. Somers, Cowper, and Walpole, to whom Harley made overtures in deference to the Queen's wish for a composite Ministry, resenting the treatment which had been

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

meted out to their old colleagues, Sunderland and Godolphin, refused to join the Ministry.

The reign of compromise was over. Both Queen and country were now in the hands of the Tories. Party feeling at this crisis ran so high that ladies in society sat at opposite sides of the building when they went to the opera. They showed their colours by the different kind of fans they carried, and wore patches in a manner which revealed even to strangers whether they were Whigs or Tories. Political friendships which had stood the strain of years were snapped asunder, and talk grew boisterous and menacing in every fashionable coffee-house and common tavern. Men quarrelled over the conduct of the war, and women over the rival claims at Court of the Duchess and Mrs. Masham. The merchants, and, in fact, the moneyed classes generally, deemed Godolphin badly used; the landed gentry were of another mind, and, like the majority of the common people, stood by Harley. The clergy, who in no election had taken a more energetic part, pinned their faith to Henry St. John. They regarded him as the champion of the Church, because he had opposed with all his might the impeachment of Sacheverell. St. John was, in truth, an odd hero for the clergy, for he was a free-thinker, whose character, to say the least, was not irreproachable.

The Revolution which brought William to the throne had shattered the ascendancy both of the Church and the landed interest. The Tories were bent on the restoration of the old order in Church and State; Godolphin during his last uneasy years had been kept in power largely by the moneyed and trading classes, many of whom were Dissenters as well as Whigs, who had set aside hereditary right to the crown. Harley, though oddly enough a Dissenter by birth and training, came to power to uphold the Church against the claims of Dissent. and to

protect the rights of the landed gentry. He, like St. John, saw clearly that peace was imperative, and they both inspired the cry which sprang up in the autumn of 1710 with the suddenness of a tropical storm, that Marlborough stood in its way.

They found their chief weapon against the Duke in Swift. Bitter, vehement, unscrupulous, Swift possessed the art of clear and racy expression. He could simulate moral indignation when he did not feel it, and he had at his command all the resources of irony and invective. He was a great force in English letters, and, in spite of outbursts of petulance and vulgarity, few writers approached him in easy mastery of incisive speech or in the power to make the worse appear the better cause. He was a man of haughty and unbending temper, who, though he could cringe on occasion, carried resentment, when his pride was wounded, to wild lengths, and, in spite of his sacred calling, cherished the unlovely spirit of vindictiveness. His gown and cassock sat uneasily upon him, for the cure of souls was the last task in the world for which he was suited by temper and predilection. Theology was a dead letter to him. He could never have excelled as a clergyman, for he lacked reverence and sympathy, and was too open in his scorn of the common people. His passion was politics, his power was the pen. He was to use it afterwards at the call of imagination, and to gain for himself, in consequence, a lofty place in literature. But in 1710 he was in London, restless, ambitious, and unemployed. He possessed the full head and the empty purse which are said to constitute the two spurs to literary exertion. His magic wit was, in consequence, at the service of any statesman who deemed it well to use it. Looking back on his career at a later period, Swift declared that the lack of a great title and fortune was the secret of all his efforts to distinguish himself. He wanted, he frankly admitted, to be "used like a lord

by those who have an opinion of my parts," and he was shrewd enough to see that a reputation for wit might serve his purpose just as well as a blue ribbon or a coach and six horses. Bored to death by his country living in Ireland, he had at the age of forty-two taken his courage in his hands and come to London, in the hope that if he plunged boldly with all his shining gifts into the game of politics he might gain substantial preferment.

Godolphin had met his overture coldly. The Whigs needed clever pamphleteers badly, but somehow the Lord Treasurer, even when wellnigh driven to bay, looked askance at a cleric of savage humour and biting speech. It was Harley who took the measure of the man, and introduced him to St. John, and so Swift gained his footing with the Tories, and paid for it handsomely by the boldness and vigour with which he championed their cause. He fanned the growing discontent about the war. He denounced the conduct of the Allies; he made Marlborough, who had raised the nation to the pinnacle of glory, a target for all the shafts of ridicule and calumny. He was almost as great a genius with the pen as was Marlborough with the sword, and he bent without scruple all his powers to the hero's undoing.

Swift made Harley's acquaintance on the 4th of October, 1710. He states that the Minister received him with the "greatest marks of kindness and esteem." He was exactly the man whom the Tories needed at that crisis. They had already no lack of weak but venomous scribblers at their call; what they wanted was a man possessed of shining gifts who would stick at nothing.

He seems to have believed that the war was likely to come to an end if, for no other reason, that its sinews, in the shape of money, were, in 1711, dwindling away. In a letter to the Earl of Peterborough, dated the 4th of May, occur the words:

"I foresee we shall have a Peace next year, by the same sagacity that I have often foreseen when I was young, I must leave the town in a week—because my money is gone and I can borrow no more."<sup>1</sup>

But he was a year out of his reckoning. Swift had come to London ostensibly on an ecclesiastical mission. He arrived in August, and the Whigs, whose fate then hung in the balance, were in no humour to trouble themselves with the affairs of the Irish Church. Harley now undertook to settle the matter at once, and told Swift to come to him whenever he liked, but added cautiously, "not to his Levée, since that was not a place for friends to meet." The "Journal to Stella" had been commenced; it ended in April, 1713. It reflects as in a mirror Swift's movements, his intimacy with statesmen and men of letters, and his confidential tattle with Mrs. Masham. It is a human document, perfectly outspoken, because never intended for publication, and is rich in sidelights on politics and society. Within a fortnight of his introduction to Harley, Swift wrote that he already stood ten times better with the new people—that is, the Tories—than he had ever done with the old. He found Harley so "excessively obliging" that he was at a loss to understand his civility. Before long he was admitted to that statesman's Saturday dinners, where he discussed high politics with his host and St. John. His powerful new friends even began to call him "Jonathan," and the world seemed at his feet. Harley told him that the great want of the Ministry was "some good pen," and St. John, who had just started the *Examiner*, with the aid of Prior, Atterbury, and other writers, had not much difficulty in wheedling him into accepting its control. He took up this congenial task on the 2nd of November, 1710, and relinquished

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D., edited by F. Elrington Ball, p. 254. London, 1910.



it on the 14th of June, 1711. Addison tried to answer him in the *Whig Examiner*, but he was too polished, not to say too scrupulous, a writer to be a match for Swift in polemical warfare.

The Tories wanted to convince the nation that they stood for justice and common-sense. There were Whigs to be conciliated who were tired of the war, and Tories to be persuaded that Harley stood for the interest of both Church and State. Beyond all else, Marlborough was to be discredited, and his position, as far as possible, undermined, at the very moment when the new Ministry was assuring him of its cordial support. Swift's strong point was invective, his foible was lack of veracity. He knew perfectly well that the taxation which the war made inevitable had struck at the pockets of the people, and with an ingenuity which was as remarkable as it was ingenious he assailed Marlborough—though no man longed more sincerely for quiet—as the chief obstacle to Peace. Primed by his patrons, he was sufficiently unmanly, even as early as the 23rd of November, to insinuate that the Duchess had feathered her nest by dishonourable means during the years when she had been supreme at Court. It was a charge that was absolutely false, as the Duchess proved by sending in her audited accounts. Queen Anne, bitter and implacable though she now was, at once passed them, adding significantly: "Cheating was never the Duchess's fault."

In the autumn of 1710 Swift was so well posted up with the gossip of the Court that he was able to say with palpable exaggeration: "The Duchess of Marlborough's removal has been seven years working, that of the Treasurer almost three, and he was to have been dismissed before Lord Sunderland."<sup>1</sup> It is a statement which may be accepted with a pinch of salt, but it shows how absolutely Swift was gulled by Harley.

<sup>1</sup> "Journal to Stella."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PLOT THICKENS AND MARLBOROUGH FALLS

THE building of Blenheim was brought to a standstill that autumn, greatly to the chagrin of the Duchess, though scarcely to the surprise of the Duke, who saw how the wind was blowing. The payment of the workpeople by Government was stopped. Godolphin went down and exclaimed indignantly: "Let them keep their heap of stones!" Vanbrugh appealed in vain to the Duke. He was determined to leave the Queen and Harley to do as they pleased about the building. The Duke told the Duchess not to "meddle in the accounts," or to allow any of her friends to touch them. Her Majesty, he declared, was mistress of her moneys, and consequently of her time about finishing the palace. Then he added:

"Whilst the Lord Treasurer was in and I had the Queen's favour, I was very earnest to have had it finished, but as it is, I am grown indifferent, for, as things are now, I do not see how I can have any pleasure in living in a country where I have so few friends."<sup>1</sup>

That letter was written on the 30th of October, and a few days later he again insists with dignity:

"It is in no way proper for us to be directing the Queen's money. I beg they may take their own method, both as to accounts past and to come. I will give no direction, being very sure that fault would be found."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Blenheim, he declared proudly, "was meant to express the sense of England's indebtedness to him. It might remain as it stood, half built," as Vanbrugh called it in one of his letters, as a "monument of ingratitude."

He was chafing not a little just then at the results of the campaign of 1710. He had hoped when it began, just after the failure of the peace negotiation of Gertruydenburg, to have struck the final blow by carrying the war into the heart of France; but his plans had been frustrated by a wet summer, by illness on an alarming scale in his army, by the political confusion in England, which had hindered the arrival of Engineers who were needed for the artillery, and by the reinforcements which Villars had brought to the seat of war. As it was, he had made a brilliant dash through the French lines, and captured Douay on the 26th of June, Bethune on the 28th of August, St. Venant on the 29th of September, and Aire on the 12th of November, all of them fortified places. But he had been compelled to relinquish the expedition against Calais and Boulogne, though both seemed within his grasp at the beginning of the campaign. When it was over, he wrote to the Duchess in November, stating that, after spending a few days at The Hague in order to settle military projects for 1711, he meant to sail for England. The letter reveals clearly his disappointment at the turn of events:

"I see no quietness in England. Yet I am, like a sick man, desiring and believing to find ease in another place, though I fear there is too much reason for me not to be so happy as yet to be blessed with quietness."<sup>1</sup>

Godolphin, and not Godolphin alone, but the Whigs also, had expressed their anxiety that, in spite of political changes, he would retain his command. The

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

Duke states in allusion to this that he desires to be governed, in the crisis which had arisen, by the views of the Whigs, from whose principles he never intends to depart:

"Whilst they had a majority in the House of Commons, they might suspect that it might be my interest that made me act in conjunction with them. But now they must do me the justice to see that it is my inclination."<sup>1</sup>

Three months before that letter was written the Whig Ministry had been dismissed, and Harley and St. John had come to power at the head of a Tory Administration.

Marlborough might well feel depressed. In spite of his proud position in Europe and his unbroken series of victories, he was at the mercy of circumstances in England. The Queen and the Duchess were not on speaking terms. His son-in-law had been dismissed from office. Godolphin, who had supplied the sinews of war, and was a statesman in whom he placed implicit confidence, had been driven from power. Harley and St. John were in authority, and both of them, in spite of fair words, were his implacable foes. It looked as if a war which had made England the arbitrator of Europe, was now to be directed by men who desired peace at any price. The Duke knew that Louis XIV., his marshals and his statesmen, saw that they might still triumph in the council-chamber, though they had again and again been defeated in the field. Marlborough seemed to have spent his strength for naught, and now a hireling press, as able as vindictive, was crying him down, to the surprise and indignation of the nation's Allies, whilst the very house which bore the magic name of Blenheim stood unfinished and desolate amid the clamour of workmen whose wages had not been paid. The soldiers of Marlborough were accustomed to say

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

that when the strain of battle grew critical the Duke grew most serene. His confidences are placed before the world in this volume, and if they show that he was sensitive, uneasy, and wounded by the turn of events, he still carried his head high, and only the Duchess and Godolphin knew then that beneath his unruffled composure there lurked the bitterness of a man into whose soul the iron had entered. He came back to England, and at the end of December, for the first time in his experience, the usual thanks of Parliament were disallowed.

On the 17th of January, 1711, the Duke was received in audience by the Queen. He was a proud man, but he humbled himself by an attempt to bring about at least a partial reconciliation between Her Majesty and the Duchess. His friends at home and abroad were imploring him at all hazards to retain his post. He knew better than anyone else in England the anxiety of the Allies at the thought of his possible retirement. He wanted, moreover, to bring the war to a triumphant conclusion, and for this end to keep the Duchess from angry outbursts and the Queen from assuming an attitude towards her of open hostility. The Duchess herself was alarmed at the Duke's aspect when he returned to England. He looked worn, his health seemed failing. She persuaded herself that, if the strain upon him were not relaxed, he had scarcely six months to live. So he carried a letter from her to the Queen—the last communication between them—which must have cost so proud a woman a great deal to write. In it the Duchess declared her sorrow for anything which she might have done to render Her Majesty uneasy. She made her submission in short, but with characteristic frankness. Her motive was to save the Duke from chagrin and the nation from mischief. The Queen received Marlborough coldly. She toyed with

the Duchess's letter, and at first refused to open it. When at last she read it, all that she had to say was: "I cannot change my resolution." The Duke pleaded with Her Majesty not to break with the Duchess till the Crown had no further need of his own services. He intimated that they both desired to retire together, and hinted that it would be no great strain on Her Majesty's patience, since he thought the war would end in less than a year. All that he could say was of no avail. The Queen demanded the return of the gold key of the Mistress of the Robes within three days. The Duke asked that at least an interval of ten days might be granted, but the Queen repeated her demand, and, as if to give an additional sting to it, now insisted that the key must be relinquished within two days.

The Duke quitted the presence determined to resign his command, in order to cover the insult to the Duchess; but she rose to the occasion, and entreated him to take no such step, but, on the contrary, to carry the key to the Queen that very evening. After a struggle he yielded, and renewed his request to know the grounds of Her Majesty's displeasure. The Queen faltered, but gave him no intelligible reply. Marlborough has been blamed for not immediately throwing up his command, but he saw that to do so would imperil the common cause; and when Prince Eugene added his protests to those of Godolphin, he determined to remain in the saddle, in the hope that he might still bring the war to a conclusion which would reflect lustre not on England alone, but on her Allies. He little knew when he came to that decision that Harley was already meditating a separate treaty with France, and that St. John, whom he had befriended when quite unknown, was preparing a trap for him, based on information to which he had access as Secretary of State, concerning the financial aspects

of the war. In spite of their ceaseless intrigues, now with the Court of Hanover and now with that of St. Germans, they were, at the moment of the dismissal of the Duchess, advancing steadily in the Queen's favour. Harley, indeed, through the dastardly attempt of the French spy, Guiscard, to assassinate him, and the popularity of the South Sea Scheme, which he instituted in order to replenish the national Exchequer, rose in public estimation; whilst the attitude of the Crown towards him was revealed when he was created Earl of Oxford early in 1711, and given the post of Lord Treasurer, which had been in commission since Godolphin's fall. His brilliant colleague, St. John, who was shortly to become his deadly rival, was also raised to the peerage in 1712, with the title of Viscount Bolingbroke, the name by which he is best known on the page of history.

Meanwhile the Duke had gone abroad with a heavy heart to open the new campaign. He arrived at The Hague on the 4th of March. Harley had assured him of support and of his anxiety that military operations should be pushed forward with vigour, and yet the Lord Treasurer was busy in secret communication with Louis XIV., of which the Duke knew nothing. Moreover, Marlborough's position with the army was imperilled by a spirit of faction which the Ministry did nothing to discourage. Hence his protest to Harley; it was written on the 28th of May, 1711:

"I am in no way ambitious of power, but if it is not made visible to the officers that I have the Queen's protection, it will make it very difficult for me to preserve that discipline in the Army which I have very much at heart."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of all his chagrin in England, Marlborough believed in the spring of 1711 that he stood on the brink of a great military triumph abroad. He had

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

always desired to humble France by invasion, and to end the war at the gates of Paris, and that ambition was shared by Prince Eugene. But the stars in their courses seemed fighting against him now. Before the Allies could take field and push the advantages they had gained in 1710, tidings arrived of the sudden death at Vienna, on the 17th of April, of the Emperor Joseph—an event which altered in a moment the whole political situation, and deprived Marlborough of the invaluable aid of one who had always given his bold military plans firm support. The Emperor's death, notwithstanding diplomatic condolences, was a relief to Harley. It gave him a fresh pretext for his negotiations with France, which were carried on without the knowledge of the Allies—a distinct breach of treaty obligations—as well as behind the back of the Captain-General, who had been sent with a shower of hollow compliments to commence hostilities anew.

The Archduke Charles, the Austrian claimant to the crown of Spain, now became head of the Habsburg dynasty, and was elected to the Imperial Throne as Charles VI. As Emperor of the West he held sway over Austria, Italy, and the Netherlands. Though the aim of the whole war had been the question of the Spanish Succession, England, which had struggled so long and so gloriously against the grandson of Louis XIV. as ruler of the Peninsula, suddenly realized that Philip of Anjou was a less evil on the throne of Spain than the addition of that crown to the great heritage already possessed by the Empire. The immediate result was the shattering of Marlborough and Eugene's concerted plan of action for carrying the war into France. Prince Eugene and his army were instantly recalled from the Netherlands to act as a barrier against any hostile action to the new Emperor by Louis XIV.



Marlborough's supreme ability as a soldier was as conspicuous as ever in what proved to be his last campaign. The Imperial troops had been withdrawn, and his own army had been seriously weakened, not merely by the absence of the five battalions which had been summoned from Flanders for the ill-fated expedition to Newfoundland, but by the need of relieving garrisons to protect the towns which he had captured in 1710. He took the field with an army which was greatly inferior in point of numbers to that of Villars, who had occupied a strong position behind entrenched lines thrown up in the winter, which was supposed to be impregnable. Villars wrote to Louis XIV. declaring that he had brought Marlborough to a "Ne Plus Ultra" by the construction of the famous entrenched lines, called by that name, which formed the French frontier from the Channel to Namur. The French army held the ground between Oisy and Bouchain. The Duke, ardently as he wished to do so, saw that it would be madness to risk a pitched battle. If he was to triumph, it must be by stratagem.

On the 2nd of August, after a series of rapid movements which mystified Villars, the Duke drew up his army within a league of the fortified lines. His own officers were amazed at his audacity, for half the army had been sent by this time on a secret mission. The whisper ran through the camp that the Duke had lost his head, for no one could understand his proceedings, except on the supposition he was about to court destruction. Villars thought that Marlborough was at length at his mercy, for he knew that the Duke's army was no match for his own, even apart from the French advantage in the fortified lines. Next day Marlborough made a reconnaissance in view of the enemy, pointing out exactly the positions his troops should take in the approaching action.

When it was over, the rank and file went back to their camp predicting terrible and futile slaughter, and declaring that next day would see an end of them. At nightfall the Duke suddenly ordered the drums to roll, and told the army to strike its tents, and with all speed to prepare itself for movement. At nine o'clock the whole of Marlborough's troops were marching eastwards under the moonlight, and eight hours later reached the banks of the Scarpe. pontoons were thrown across the river, and just as the army had crossed a note from Cadogan was thrust into Marlborough's hand. It was then that Marlborough issued his historic command to the tired troops: "The Duke desires that the infantry will step out." By this time Villars was in hot pursuit, for it was plain that Marlborough meant to cross the Scheldt, and, after a forced march of thirty-six miles, he broke through the "Ne Plus Ultra" and invested Bouchain, in spite of all that the enemy could do to forestall him. For sheer military skill and daring there were few achievements, even in Marlborough's career, more brilliant than the capture of this fortified town, which capitulated, after a stubborn siege, on the 14th of September.

The Duke, who never let the grass grow under his feet, prepared at once for the siege of Quesnoy, in order to throw open the road through France. Voltaire admits ("Siècle de Louis XIV.") that thence to Paris there was scarcely a rampart to oppose him. But the Duke had shot his last bolt; his downfall was at hand. Harley at this point interposed. Secret negotiations with France had prospered, and in defiance of the terms of the Grand Alliance England had determined to make a separate peace with Louis XIV. Marlborough's indignation at so base a betrayal was acute, but he was powerless. The hirelings of the Press, prompted by Bolingbroke,

were already crying down the capture of Bouchain, though every military man in Europe knew that it had been achieved, at tremendous odds, by a stroke of genius. The Duke had fought his last battle. He had been crippled all through the campaign by the half-hearted support of the Ministry, who had tricked him and kept him in the dark as to their real intentions. At last he saw through the plausible pretexts of Harley and St. John, and had no alternative but to return to The Hague. There he first heard of the charges of peculation which were presently to be brought against him, and on the heels of such bitter tidings came the news that Preliminaries of Peace had been signed in London. He had always held his own in battle, and was the idol of the men who served under him. Fate was peculiarly cruel to him. Honoured and victorious abroad, with an unparalleled record as a soldier, he was now to be dishonoured and slandered at home, and assailed like a pickpocket, at the instance of unscrupulous Ministers and a venal Press, by a nation which had gained ascendancy in Europe by the magic of his sword.

Louis XIV. had good reason to congratulate himself on the turn of events. In 1709 he had vainly sued for peace, and had even attempted by the offer of a huge bribe, which was indignantly declined, to bring Marlborough, who was then master of the situation, to terms. Madame de Maintenon's words at that time are significant:

"The King was too proud, and he has been humiliated. France aspired too high, and perhaps her pretensions were unjust. The nation had become insolent and perverted."

But in 1711, notwithstanding fresh military reverses to France, Harley and St. John were willing to make peace behind the back of the Allies, because without it their own position in England was insecure.

Versailles stood amazed at the terms which were offered, and could not understand, with Marlborough still victorious in the field, how it came about that England should adopt so conciliatory an attitude. The Queen knew all about the negotiations with France, though the nation was kept in the dark.

The policy of the Ministers in the autumn of 1711 was to discredit Marlborough, and nothing was left undone by scribblers in the Press to drag him down. He felt it keenly, and told Harley just after Bouchain that he had been "given a mortal wound," and the latter with incredible effrontery professed to sympathize with him. "I do assure your Grace I abhor the practice as mean and disingenuous." He was in reality laughing in his sleeve, for nothing suited his purpose better. Louis XIV. had a short way with libellers. He clapped them into the Bastille or sent them to the galleys. But in England, when Marlborough was their noble quarry, they wrote with impunity, and were encouraged in high places, until even Swift, who was Marlborough's deadly foe, declared that the accusations against the Duke were pushed too hardly. The moment that Marlborough heard at The Hague of the charges of fraud and embezzlement of public money which were brought against him by the Commissioners appointed by Parliament to inquire into the conduct of the war, he wrote to them a letter, in which he stated that the whole of the money which he was said to have misappropriated had been used in the public service for secret intelligence concerning the enemies' designs. He had no difficulty, on his return to England, in proving up to the hilt the truth of that assertion, and the charges against him were in consequence dropped. Yet on the 31st of December, 1711, the Queen thought fit to dismiss him from all his employments. The Duke indignantly threw the letter, in which Her Majesty stated her decision,

into the fire. Next day twelve new peers were created to give the Ministry a majority in the Lords. But Harley, or, as he must now be called, Oxford, though he little knew it, was riding for a fall. When the tidings of the Duke's fall reached Versailles, Louis XIV. exclaimed: "The dismissal of Marlborough will do all that we can desire!"

Whilst the Duke was still abroad fighting for the honour of England, the Queen, after the final rupture with the Duchess, lost no time in appointing the Duchess of Somerset Mistress of the Robes, and Mrs. Masham Keeper of the Privy Purse. One of the charges brought against the Duchess of Marlborough in almost every history of the reign is that in a fit of petulance she deliberately wrecked her apartments at St. James's Palace, and went so far as to remove the marble mantelpieces from the rooms she had occupied. It was even hinted abroad at the time that the Queen gave, as a reason for stopping the work at Blenheim, that she would not build a house for one who had pulled down and gutted her own. The Duchess absolutely repudiated such charges. She stated that she had removed nothing from her lodgings at St. James's that was not her own property. All that she took away were "brass locks of my own buying," and the pictures and mirrors she had hung on the wainscot. She maintained that the charges brought against her in the *Examiner* were due to the prompting of Harley. When she quitted her apartments, apart from the brass locks, "everything was in good order." That statement does not rest on her own words alone, for the housekeeper at the Palace wrote a letter which confirmed it.

As to Blenheim, she had never shared the Duke's ambition for a house on so palatial a scale. Here it is possible to cite her own words from an unpublished paper written in old age:

"Every friend of mine knows that I was always against building at such an expense, and as long as I meddled with it at all, I took as much pains to lessen the charge every way, as if it was to be paid for out of the fortune that was to provide for my own children. I always thought it too great a sum even for the Queen to pay, and nothing made it tolerably easy to me, but my knowing that as she never did a generous thing of herself, if that expense had not been recommended by the Parliament and paid out of the Civil List, she would have done nothing with the money that was better. I never liked any building so much for the show and vanity of it as for its usefulness and convenience, and therefore I was always against the whole design of Blenheim, as too big and unwieldy, whether I considered the pleasure of living in it, or the good of my family who were to enjoy it hereafter. Besides that the greatness of the work made it longer in finishing, and consequently would hinder Lord Marlborough from enjoying it when it was reasonable for him to lose no time. I made Mr. Vanbrugh my enemy by the constant disputes I had with him to prevent his extravagance.

"Soon after my Lord Oxford had made a merit to Lord Marlborough of his having prevailed with the Queen to continue money for the building, I received a letter from abroad that there were no hopes that the French would give such a Peace as even so bold a villain as my Lord Oxford durst accept, and therefore 'tis probable he ordered this money (£20,000) to delude Lord Marlborough so far as to make him continue in the service for the sake of having that great work finished, since his lordship would have too many difficulties, when no Peace could be had, to fall out quite with Lord Marlborough. I hear the money is to be paid in such little sums, if at all, that it looks like a design rather to keep some hold of Lord Marlborough than to do him any real good."

She adds, looking back on the withholding of the workmen's wages in 1711:

"There never was so ridiculous a pretence for stopping a building recommended by Parliament, and designed as a public monument of our victories against France."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

There is at Blenheim a copy, in Arthur Maynwaring's handwriting, of a letter which he wrote to the Queen just before the dismissal of the Duchess. It is so bold that it is extremely unlikely that the original was forwarded, especially as the writer held an official appointment at the time. It seems reasonable to think that it was written in reality to gratify the Duchess. A citation from it will show its purport, and it is interesting as a revelation of how high feeling ran at that crisis amongst the friends of the Duchess:

"Your Majesty's favour to the Duchess of Marlborough was always looked upon as a peculiar happiness to your people, because it naturally led you to put your chief confidence in the two ablest men in your kingdom (Marlborough and Godolphin). I have often heard it said that she was the only favourite that ever a Sovereign was the better for. Must the Duchess at last be disgraced for the sake of one raised by herself from nothing, almost without a name until she was known by a very black crime?—I mean that of ingratitude. Sure, Madame, this can be no fit companion for a great Queen adorned with all Christian and moral virtues, and therefore, for God's sake, Madame, consider what you are doing. . . . Nothing can restore the Duke of Marlborough's credit in foreign courts but your Majesty's showing your utmost indignation against his enemies in your own."<sup>1</sup>

Such a protest suggests Mr. Secretary Craggs's remark, when it was already evident that the Duchess had lost the favour of the Crown, and all the more since he also realized what this meant to Marlborough:

"It is enough to distract one to consider that Mr. Harley, Mrs. Masham, and their creatures, should reap the benefit of the most glorious actions that ever were performed, when they were no more instrumental in bringing them about than their coach-horses!"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

One concession the Queen made to the Duchess: she was allowed to retain her appointment as Ranger of Windsor Forest, and to the close of her life the Old Lodge, which was afterwards pulled down to build a house for the Duke of Cumberland, continued to be her favourite residence. There is a hint in one of Maynwaring's letters that the Duchess at this time was so restless that she talked of quitting England altogether, and declared that she might take up her abode either at Mindelheim or, strange to say, America.<sup>1</sup>

As the summer of 1711 wore uneasily along, the Duke appears to have grown impatient about the building of Blenheim. He was beginning to feel, as he put it, that it looked as if he were "never to have any quietness there or anywhere else." Vanbrugh was bombarding him with letters, asking for instructions, in view of the laggard attitude of Harley. At length, probably with a touch of impatience, Marlborough, though he had told the Duchess a few months earlier not to commit herself in the matter, seems to have given definite orders to the architect himself. Vanbrugh declared, in a document which still exists amongst the archives—on which is endorsed, in the handwriting of the Duchess, "Mr. Vanbrugh's paper of what he says Lord Marlborough ordered to be done in the building, 1711"—that the Duke told him in writing to finish the west towers of the palace, with the balustrades and ornamental masonry; to complete the colonnade leading to the chapel; to make the steps up to the great portico and those from the salon down to the garden; to finish the hall and salon; and to complete the palace from that point eastward, so that the private apartments might be made ready for furniture. He was also told to finish the bridge, to cope the garden walls, to pave the great

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.



court, and to finish the buildings in the housekeeper's department. It would have been better, perhaps, if the Duke had not interfered, for his action led ultimately to fresh wrangles about the expenditure over the house, and in the end he was mulcted to the extent of £60,000.

Marlborough landed at Greenwich on the 17th of November. Parliament met three weeks later, and the terms of the peace preliminaries with France, which had been signed on the 27th of September, at once came up in debate. Lord Nottingham, who by this time had joined forces with the Whigs in opposition to the Occasional Conformity Bill—a harsh measure promoted by the Tories against the Dissenters—moved that no peace would be lasting which left the Bourbons in possession of Spain and the Indies. The Duke took part in the discussion, and defended himself against the charge that he had personal reasons for the continuance of the war, and Nottingham's motion was carried against the Ministry by a small majority. The point which he had raised was promptly brought forward in the Commons, where a resolution, in similar terms to his own, was defeated by a substantial majority. The Lords adjourned for the Christmas recess on the 21st of December, and, as Shrewsbury was now making overtures to Marlborough, the Ministry determined to bring matters to an issue. The report of the Commissioners, which charged the Duke with the appropriation of public money, was ordered to be delayed by the House of Commons, and, in order to abolish the hostile majority in the Upper House, twelve new peers were created, one of them being the husband of Mrs. Masham.

On the 31st of December the Queen issued an order dismissing Marlborough from all his employments, giving as the ostensible reason that the accusations against him "might undergo an impartial investiga-

tion." It was a high-handed proceeding, and on the face of it palpably unjust, for the charges, though formulated, had not been proved. After this act of indignity had been done, they were subsequently discussed at length in the Commons, with the result that the prosecution was dropped. It had served its purpose by the Duke's removal. In other words, the Tory Government induced the Queen to dismiss Marlborough on a charge which had not been substantiated, and the failure to prove the case against him is, in itself, evidence enough that, though he had accepted gifts from the Allies, he was not guilty of using, for personal ends, public money entrusted to him by the nation for the conduct of the war. It was in this manner that Marlborough, in spite of his splendid services to the nation, was hounded out of public life amid a storm of unscrupulous newspaper clamour.

The Duke accepted his dismissal with dignity. In a letter to the Queen, he expressed the hope that Her Majesty might never find the want of a servant as faithful as he had always endeavoured to be. He complained that his enemies had prevailed with the Queen to take such a step in a "manner that is most injurious to me." He added:

"If their malice and inveteracy against me had not been more powerful with them than the consideration of Your Majesty's honour and justice, they would not have influenced you to impute the occasion of my dismissal to a false and malicious insinuation contrived by themselves and made public when there was no opportunity for me to give it my answer."<sup>1</sup>

He spoke of his age, of the fatigues pressing upon him, and he stated that they combined to make him "ardently wish for the power to enjoy a quiet repose in order to think of eternity." But he protested,

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 280.

both in Parliament and in his letter to the Queen, against separate negotiations with France. He wanted peace to be made in concert with the Allies, and thought that England was breaking faith with the other Powers which formed the Grand Alliance, in trying to arrange terms which left them in the lurch. It was his stiff, unaccommodating attitude which in reality brought about his downfall. Oxford and Bolingbroke, as already shown, knew they could only retain power at home if they made peace abroad, and therefore they poisoned the mind of the Queen and the nation by a "falsely malicious insinuation," which drove the greatest man in England from power.

There is a curious document still at Blenheim which purports to be a copy of a letter written by Louis XIV. to the Cardinal de Noailles, Archbishop of Paris. It is probably fictitious, but at least it reveals the view which was held in France in January, 1712, when the Court of Versailles was filled with rejoicing over Marlborough's dismissal. The document is too long to quote in its entirety, but the following typical passages may be cited:

"Cousin and Chancellor, we greet you well. It is with the greatest satisfaction that we communicate to you the agreeable account which we received by our last Despatches from Great Britain, of the entire defeat of the D. of M—b—gh."

"We hoped the timely death of that Prince (William III.) would have desolved this confederacy (the Grand Alliance) formed by him, but M—b—gh soon made us sensible that these hopes were vain. His consummate wisdom, his even and immovable temper, inspired their councils and armies with an unanimity not to be shaken by the variety of their forms of government, difference of religious or civil interests, or all the mutual jealousies or distrusts our utmost art and industry could insinuate. He formed

their well-concocted designs, and executed what he formed; by him all our resolutions were discovered almost as soon as taken, and scarce sooner detected than disappointed. Whether he attacked our lives, besieged our towns, or fought our armies, neither armies, towns, nor lives put the least stop to the progress of his arms, success everywhere attending him as the natural consequence of his steady conduct and courage."

The document goes on to say that the Danube, the Rhine, the Meuse, the Scheldt, with innumerable smaller streams, will "remain monuments of his glory till they cease to flow." It hints that the Saône and Seine might have been added to this list if England herself had not "reasonably interposed on our behalf." It speaks of Marlborough being removed from his command "at a time when his Queen, his country, and the whole Confederacy stood most in need of his assistance." Allusion is next made to the grounds of his dismissal. They "demand an account of him of the sum applied by him to get intelligence, well knowing that the nature of that account admits of no vouchers." The Duke cannot "discover to whom those sums have been paid without disclosing to us at the same time the betrayal of our secrets."

It is added: "Thus the man, whom the united forces of France and Spain could not overcome, has fallen by the hands of those for whom he conquered." After some vain-glorious declarations concerning what all this meant to France, the final words are reached:

"We therefore require you to cause *Te Deum* to be sung in the Church of Notre Dame in our good city of Paris on ye (27th) day of January, for this memorable deliverance of us and our people from the imminent dangers we lately were exposed to, and for the fair prospect of reaping the fruits of all our toil. Given at our Court of Versailles, ye (17) day of (January, 1712).

"LOUIS."

[Countersigned "TORCY."]<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

The dates are filled in by another hand.

The *Gazette* which announced the dismissal of the Duke of Marlborough announced that the Duke of Ormonde had been appointed Captain-General by the Queen, and was at once to take command of the forces in Flanders. Ormonde was a pronounced Jacobite, and probably that circumstance had a good deal to do with his selection. His appointment to supreme military command was more or less of a blind, for the negotiations with France were sufficiently advanced to lead Oxford and Bolingbroke to know that the war was virtually at an end, though it was not politic at the moment to admit such a fact, even to Ormonde.

Lord Wolseley did well to insist that three great national heroes, Marlborough, Nelson, and Wellington, had one characteristic in common. They believed that the finest quality of a patriotic servant of the Crown was summed up in the "noble, selfless" word Duty. "Marlborough, his great serene mind ruffled for a moment by insult, comforts himself by this magic word ('We must continue to do our duty'). Nelson thrills his eager fleet and all future generations of Englishmen with it. Wellington, cold and impregnable, rests upon it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough," by Viscount Wolseley. London, 1894, vol. ii., p. 445 [Unfortunately, Lord Wolseley's "Life of Marlborough" was never completed. It only brings the story of the Duke's career up to the year of Queen Anne's accession, and therefore leaves untouched the historic battles on which his renown as a soldier is built.]

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## CHAPTER XXI

### MARLBOROUGH OUT OF THE SADDLE

BEFORE 1712 was a week old, Prince Eugene landed in England. He came on a special Embassy from the Emperor Charles VI. Vienna, like The Hague, was at a loss to understand England's sudden complaisancy towards France. The Emperor feared the loss of his most powerful ally, and Prince Eugene was the bearer of an autograph letter to Queen Anne, charged with proposals in regard to the war. Nothing could well have been more disconcerting to Oxford and St. John than the dramatic appearance on the scene, at this juncture, of the Duke's great comrade in arms. Prince Eugene, as soon as he landed, was told that Marlborough had been dismissed. He had never dreamed that so illustrious a soldier could be treated with such contumely, especially at a moment when the whole of Europe looked to him to bring the War of the Spanish Succession to a glorious conclusion.

When the Prince arrived in London, he was warned that the less attention he bestowed on Marlborough the more agreeable would his conduct be regarded by the Queen. If he had known that Oxford and St. John had intended to drive the Duke from power by false accusations, it is certain that he never would have consented to undertake a mission to the English Court; but, unaware of what even Swift called the manner in which "personal resentment was allowed to mix with public affairs," he had come to England

to represent the Emperor's view of the political situation, and to prevent, if possible, any action which would nullify as well as discredit the Grand Alliance. Marlborough's dismissal placed Prince Eugene in a difficult and delicate position. He would have gratified the Queen and her Ministers if he had credited the accusations against Marlborough; but he knew the Duke too well not to see the true position of affairs at a glance. Eugene was the last man in the world to desert another when calumny, like a full tide, was making havoc of his reputation. When he was told that it would be good policy to stand coldly aloof from Marlborough, if he wished his own mission to prosper, the Prince exclaimed proudly, "It is wholly inconsistent with my honour and temper to be wanting in respect to a friend in adverse fortune, for whom I always professed regard in the time of his prosperity."<sup>1</sup>

Eugene was received with marked distinction both by the Court and the Cabinet. The Queen presented him with a diamond-hilted sword, and Oxford entertained him at a banquet. If compliments could have turned his head, Eugene would have faltered in his allegiance to the Duke. Oxford clinked his glass, exclaiming: "I consider this day as the happiest of my life, since I have the honour to see in my house the greatest captain of the age." Prince Eugene's reply was diplomatic but stinging: "If it was so, he was obliged to his lordship for it."<sup>2</sup> He was thinking of Marlborough, and Oxford saw it and winced. Both host and guest knew perfectly well that the greatest captain of the age had been cashiered, and the Prince was aware that the man who was paying him honour had brought to confusion the foremost soldier in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memours of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> Lediard, "Life of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 269.

On a subsequent occasion, someone thrust into Eugene's hand one of the atrocious printed libels against the Duke, and drew his attention to a passage which declared that Marlborough had been "once fortunate." Eugene caught the meaning of such an insinuation, and, with chivalry, repelled it. He replied, "It is true. The Duke was *once* fortunate, and it is the greatest praise that can be bestowed upon him, for, as he was always successful, that implies that all his other successes were owing to his own conduct."<sup>1</sup>

Oxford and St. John grew uneasy at Prince Eugene's presence in London, and all the more as he lost no opportunity of openly consorting with Marlborough, and, in season and out, extolling his services to England. It was vastly inconvenient for the two statesmen, dipped as they were in political intrigues with France, to have in their midst a military hero, who could not appear in the London streets without the plaudits of the crowd. Since the Prince was impervious to flattery, they were determined, at all hazards, to turn public opinion against him. The rumour quickly ran abroad that Marlborough and Prince Eugene were in secret league, and had entered into a conspiracy to dethrone the Queen. Oxford and St. John did not assume responsibility for so ridiculous a charge, but they allowed it to be made the subject of discussion in the Privy Council, and the accusation passed unchallenged in coffee-house and tavern, and did its work.

Prince Eugene, indignant at such a charge, and not less indignant at the cold reception of his proposals for the conduct of the war, quitted England on the 17th of March, to resume command of the Imperial troops. He seems to have realized that Oxford and Bolingbroke were trying to throw dust in the eyes of

<sup>1</sup> Burnet, "History of His Own Times," vol. iv., p. 116.



the Emperor. He did not return to Flanders, however, before he had acquainted himself with all that was in Marlborough's mind about the plan of campaign for 1712.

"Deep calleth unto Deep." At the darkest period in Marlborough's fortunes—when the bitter wind of scurrilous distraction was sweeping through the land—genius in letters paid homage to genius in arms. In January, 1712, Steele published his impassioned tribute to the great soldier—"The Englishman's Thanks to the Duke of Marlborough." It was written on New Year's Day, and therefore only a few hours after Marlborough's dismissal. It opens with an expression of the author's "utmost consternation" at the tidings which he heard "this day." Steele laments that the sword is taken out of the hand of one who "defended all men from it." He conjures the Duke to take refuge in the proud memory of what he has achieved: "Past actions make up present glory. It is in the power of mortals to be thankless to you for doing them; but it is not in their power to take from you—that you have done them." He declares that the Duke's character is "indelible in the Book of Fame," and predicts that the "brightest circumstance that can be related of the Queen herself will be—'It was She for whom Marlborough conquered.'" He reminds the Duke that his glory is not changed because the rest of mankind are fickle. "My Lord, if even the glorious edifice which your country decreed should be erected to perpetuate your memory stand unfinish'd, let it stand so—a monument of the instability of human affairs."

It is significant that it was at this crisis in Marlborough's career that Addison and Steele were of one mind concerning the shameless indignities heaped upon the illustrious soldier when his renown stood four-square in Europe with Blenheim, Ramillies.

Oudenarde, and Malplaquet for its foundation-stones. In proof of this it is enough to recall their joint dedication of the fourth volume of the "Spectator" to the Duke. They declare that they have linked his "memorable name" with their pages to preserve them "from oblivion." Marlborough is reminded that he is Prince of Mindelheim, and that it was the gift of the Emperor, "whose dominions he had preserved." Then follows a sentence in which Steele's pen is revealed: "Glory established upon the uninterrupted success of honourable Designs and Actions is not subject to Diminution; nor can any Attempts prevail against it, but in the proportion which the narrow Circuit of Rumour bears to the unlimited Extent of Fame." The final sentence contains the words: "We may congratulate your Grace not only upon your high Atchievements, but likewise upon the happy Expiration of your Command, by which your Glory is put out of the Power of Fortune."

Lady Rialton and the Countess of Sunderland, both of whom keenly resented the Queen's treatment of their father and mother, followed the Duke and Duchess into retirement. Young, beautiful, and accomplished, they were both exceedingly popular in society, and held official posts at the Court of Queen Anne. It was impossible, however, for them to remain in attendance on the Queen after her harsh treatment of their mother. Lady Sunderland, at least, who was high-minded as well as highly-strung, was assuredly glad to quit a Court which she had adorned, though she was never at ease in it. Swift did not conceal his admiration of the "Little Whig," as the gallants were accustomed to call the Countess when they toasted her; but she could not endure the man—apart from his attacks on her father—for he was not in the least her idea of a clergyman. It was Sunderland who declined the Queen's pension, in words which

have become historic: "If I cannot serve the public, I will not plunder it." Shortly after the withdrawal of all the Churchills from her service, the Queen showed her resentment by issuing explicit orders, on the 7th of June, 1712, that no further payments should be given for the building of Blenheim.

The significance of Marlborough's dismissal was not lost on France. Louis XIV.'s attitude, in regard to the peace proposals, instantly stiffened. He saw that, with the Duke's sword sheathed, he could raise his terms. It was known perfectly well at Versailles that Oxford and St. John were in the mood to accept peace at any price, since the rising temper of the nation made it imperative if they were to retain power. The British plenipotentiaries at the first Conference at Utrecht were accordingly confronted, on the 11th of February, 1712, by proposals from France which brushed aside the secret negotiations signed by Masnager in London in the previous October. This gave rise to an angry debate in Parliament, in which surprise and indignation was expressed at the terms now offered by France. Oxford dreaded daylight being thrown on the secret negotiations of 1711, and Halifax's resolution, urging that the war should be carried on in concert with the Allies until an honourable peace was in sight, was passed without a division. St. John, writing to communicate this decision to the British plenipotentiaries, tried to intimidate Versailles:

"The French will see that there is a possibility of reviving the love of war in our people by the indignation which has been expressed at the plan given in at Utrecht."

It was plain to Oxford that the temper of the English people would not brook the new attitude of France, and the negotiations at Utrecht were, in consequence, suspended in favour of Torcy's proposal

that England and France, by an exchange of despatches, should determine the conditions of peace, and then force terms on the other Powers represented by the Grand Alliance.

Death invaded the Court of Versailles just as this decision was reached. The young Duchesse de Bourgogne, who was the idol of the King's old age, as well as the chief ornament of his Court, died of smallpox at the age of twenty-six on the 12th of February, 1712. Six days later her husband, the pupil of Fénelon and the hope of France, followed her to the grave, and a few days later the elder of their two sons also succumbed to the disease which carried off their parents. The Duc de Bourgogne had been Dauphin for a few months; his child had only held that rank for a few days. Stroke after stroke had fallen on the royal house, for three Dauphins had been struck down by death in the space of one year. The heir to the throne was, in consequence, a puny child, so delicate that the nation despaired of his life, though he lived to rule as Louis XV. At the moment, this little Prince alone stood between Philip V. of Spain and the throne of France. Louis XIV., old, weary, disillusioned, as well as lonely and in failing health, felt as though all his proud schemes had miscarried. Versailles had lost its gaiety by the death of the Duchesse, and France had been robbed of its dreams by the loss of the Dauphin. The only royal occupants of the palace were the old monarch, whose sun was setting in blood, and a young Prince, still in the nursery, whose life seemed to hang on a thread.

The war had begun with the disputed succession in Spain; it was to end with the settlement of the imperilled succession in France. The King recognized that the sword could not be sheathed, except by a compromise which would satisfy the Grand Alliance.

The Austrian rival to Philip—the Archduke Charles, in whose cause Marlborough and Prince Eugene had fought so many battles—was now out of the question. He had ascended the Imperial throne as Charles VI., and Europe would never consent to the possibility of the union of the two crowns. Louis XIV. had reigned for nearly seventy years, and was beginning to feel, as he afterwards put it, that it “was easy to leave the world”; but he had first of all to think what was best for the House of Bourbon. He sought to make fresh terms with England, and secret proposals and counter-proposals passed between the two Courts.

They had advanced so far by the 10th of May that the Duke of Ormonde was instructed, at all hazards, to keep the army out of action.

“It is the Queen’s positive command to your Grace,” wrote St. John on that day, “that you avoid engaging in any siege, or hazarding a battle, till you have further orders from Her Majesty.”

Ormonde was ridiculed by his enemies as a “man of straw,” and, if such contempt had not hitherto been justified, he was reduced to that unenviable position by a despatch which left him powerless. He could not even give explanations to Prince Eugene, for he had been expressly directed to conceal his sudden and humiliating instructions.

“Her Majesty thinks you cannot want pretences for conducting yourself without owning that which might at present have an ill effect if it was publicly known.”<sup>1</sup>

He was further told that France was aware of the order that had been given to him by England, and that therefore, if Marshal Villars approached the subject, he was to “answer accordingly.”

Oxford, in short, was playing a deep double

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, “Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough,” vol. iii., p. 302.

game. He had dismissed Prince Eugene with the assurance that the war was going to be vigorously renewed. He had placed Ormonde in command of the military forces of the nation ostensibly for the same purpose. He had tricked the Allies, and was pushing forward an arrangement with France about which they were in the dark. The Dutch were puzzled by Ormonde's vacillation; they withdrew their troops from his command and placed them under Prince Eugene. He appealed to Ormonde for assistance in the siege of Quesnoy, and the latter had to dissemble, and finally, driven to bay, to meet the appeal by a blank refusal. Quesnoy was taken by the Imperial and Dutch troops, under Eugene, after a siege of six weeks, on the 4th of July. Meanwhile the withdrawal of the English troops from the assistance of Prince Eugene raised angry debates in both Houses of Parliament; but in the end the Ministry triumphed, and a resolution was passed which gave Oxford the breathing-time that he wanted. He gained his point by a deliberate suppression of the truth. The fear had been expressed in the House of Lords that England might conclude a separate peace. "Nothing of that nature," exclaimed Oxford, "was ever designed. Such a peace would be so base, so knavish, and so villainous a thing, that every servant of the Queen must answer for it by his head to the nation."<sup>1</sup>

Marlborough was personally attacked in the course of the discussion by Earl Poulett: "No one can doubt the Duke of Ormonde's bravery, but he does not resemble a certain General who led troops to the slaughter, to cause a great number of officers to be knocked on the head in a battle, in order to fill his pockets by disposing of their commissions."<sup>2</sup>

The Duke instantly met the disgraceful and cruel

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Lediard, "Life of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 278.

taunt by challenging Poulett to a duel. Whereupon Lady Poulett ran to the Queen, who stopped the proposed encounter.

Louis by this time had brought his grandson to terms. Philip V. elected to abide by the throne of Spain, and publicly to renounce his presumptive rights to the crown of France. He further consented that, in case he left no direct heir, the crown of Spain should not pass to any other French Prince but to the Duke of Savoy. Louis, on his part, undertook that the Pretender, Prince James Stuart, should instantly quit French soil, and consented, even before any treaty was signed, that English troops should garrison the citadel of Dunkirk, as a further pledge of good faith. The Queen, in a speech from the throne, on the 6th of June, explained at length other terms which France was willing to concede in the interests of England, one of which was the infamous monopoly of the slave trade for the space of thirty years. "I have not," said Her Majesty significantly, "taken upon me to determine the interests of our confederates; these must be adjusted in the Congress of Utrecht." England, in other words, had fought for her own hand and prevailed, leaving the other members of the Grand Alliance at a distinct disadvantage, in spite of Oxford's denunciation of knavish tricks.

Marlborough, Godolphin, Nottingham, and Cowper, spoke on behalf of the Allies, and argued that they ought, in common fairness, to be at once included in any agreement with France. The Duke declared, "The measures pursued in England, for a year past, are directly contrary to Her Majesty's engagements with the allies; they have sullied the triumphs and glories of her reign, and will render the English name odious to all other nations."

But such protests passed unheeded.

Godolphin was ill when he made his speech in

Parliament in June, and it quickly became apparent that his days were numbered. During the summer of 1712, the Duchess, who once said, "No one has gone two steps for me, for whom I would not make ten in return," was distressed, not only by his illness, but also by that of another equally loyal friend, Arthur Maynwaring. He was only forty-four, but he had ruined his constitution, it was said, by too much champagne and burgundy. Maynwaring knew better than any other man of the period, who dipped his quill in ink, the real story of Marlborough's dismissal, and if he had outlived the Duke, or even outweathered his illness in 1712, there is little doubt that he would have challenged at length, and to some purpose, the base accusations of Swift. But through failing health, in 1711 and 1712, Maynwaring was not equal to any sustained bit of work; otherwise the statements in the "Conduct of the Allies" would not have been allowed to pass unchallenged. It was peculiarly unfortunate for the Duke that Maynwaring's death came so rapidly on the heels of his own dismissal, for that clever and light-hearted fellow had a pen which could prick bubbles with the best. He was not in the least afraid of picking up the glove even of Swift.

The Duke and Duchess spent the summer at their house at St. Albans, full of concern about Godolphin and Maynwaring. It was whilst walking in the garden there, late on a September night, that Arthur Maynwaring caught the chill which proved fatal. He lingered two months, but, in spite of all that Dr. Garth and Dr. Ratcliff could do, gradually grew worse. The Duchess sat in tears by his bedside when aware that she was about to lose a secretary who had always been loyal to her, and whom she rightly regarded as one of her most attached friends. The end came on the 13th of November.



Lord Godolphin, who needed both quiet and attention, was nursed by the Duchess with unwearied devotion through the late summer of 1712. The dying statesman was visited at St. Albans by the leaders of the Whig party, and rumour had it that Marlborough and they were engaged in concocting schemes against the Queen and Oxford. The Duke had fought his last fight abroad, and struck his tent. It stood now on the broad lawn of Holywell House, and beneath it, sheltered from the broiling sun, his life-long friend lay sick—the man who had upheld his hand through all the stress and strain of the War of the Spanish Succession. Godolphin, like Maynwaring, had lived too freely, and at sixty-seven his constitution was broken. His high spirit was broken also, for he was bitterly chagrined at the turn of events and the manner in which both the Duke and himself had been dismissed by the Queen, whose reign they had made illustrious. All that love and skill could do was lavished upon him in his hours of mortal weakness. The end came on the 15th of September, at the Duke's house at St. Albans, and no man mourned the loss of the greatest statesman of the age more than its greatest soldier. Smollett declared, with simple justice, that Sidney, Earl of Godolphin, was an "able, cool, dispassionate Minister, who rendered himself necessary to four successive Sovereigns," and controlled the public finances with equal skill and integrity. He may have hedged like other statesmen of the Revolution; but, though millions of the public money were in his keeping, he stands guiltless of fiscal misdeeds. Pope extolled Godolphin's

"high desert,  
His hand unstained, his uncorrupted heart,  
His comprehensive head."

Though he had not the constitutional aptitudes of Somers, or the brilliant gifts of St. John, he ex-

celled both of them in the consummate grasp of affairs.

The Duke was too much of a soldier to show his heart to the world, but all his friends knew that he winced at the accusations which were made against him. He was more sensitive to such attacks than the Duchess, and she, at the moment, was quite as much under the lash of public ridicule. The notorious Mrs. Manley had brought charges against her in the forgotten book called "The New Atlantis," and Swift was base enough to recommend this lying and unscrupulous traducer to the patronage of the Ministry.

The Duke's position in the late autumn of 1712 was intolerable. He had lost the confidence of the Queen, and death had deprived him of the only man who, in good and evil report, had remained his "own familiar friend." He was baffled by public intrigues, and wounded by personal insinuations. The lordly house at Woodstock, to which he had looked as a final haven of retreat, stood half built and desolate. Oxford was supreme, and at daggers drawn with him; St. John, though more diplomatic in attitude, was in truth scarcely a less deadly opponent. The Whigs were more anxious to stand well with the Court than to take up Marlborough's cause. Scribblers in the Press were scoffing at his latest military achievements—his breaking through the French lines, which was in truth one of the most brilliant and daring exploits in his whole career, but was described by these ignorant hirelings as the mere "crossing of the kennel." They even had the audacity to assert that the siege of Bouchain had "no other object" than the "capture of a dove-cote." Yet France admitted that the Duke had "covered himself with glory" through military operations, which compelled their admiration. It was said abroad that Louis XIV. welcomed his defeated commanders with more kind-

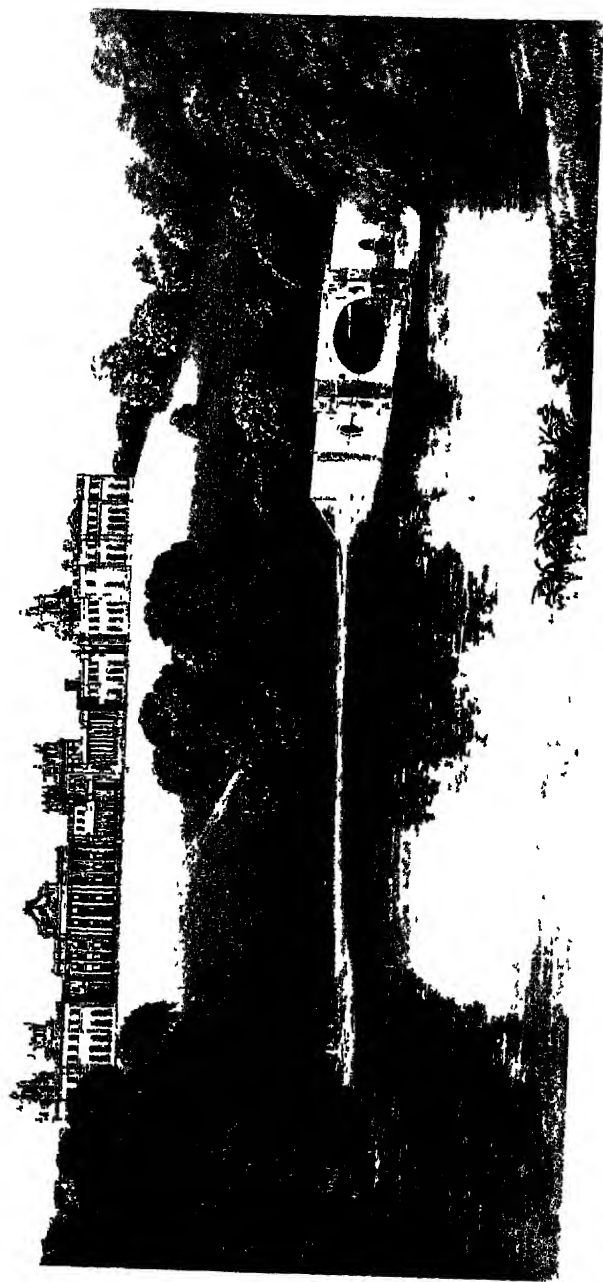
ness than England evinced towards its most illustrious General.

The legal proceedings brought against the Duke, for the recovery of sums received as percentage, had not yet been dropped, though he had sent the Commissioners the Queen's warrant issued at the beginning of the war, and countersigned by Mr. Secretary Hedges, which authorized the retention of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Now, to add to the mortification of his position, a demand for £30,000, representing arrears on the building of Blenheim, was made upon him. Proud, lonely, disillusioned, it was small wonder that the Duke determined to quit England. He was rich, renowned, and had a name to conjure with in Europe. Even Queen Anne, when she heard of his intentions, deemed him rightly advised. "The Duke does well to go abroad," was her comment when tidings reached her of his proposed departure.

The Duchess, it was arranged, was to join him a month or two later. She remained behind in order to settle up various private affairs. Marlborough always trusted her judgment in such matters, and during his prolonged absence from England had left everything that related to his property in her hands. Before leaving England he appointed his sons-in-law trustees of his estates, and also entrusted to his friend and comrade-in-arms, General Cadogan, the sum of £50,000 to invest in Dutch securities, to safeguard his family, as the Duchess remarked, in case of any public miscarriage of affairs in England. Unluckily, Cadogan, with the best intentions in the world, thought well to use his own judgment. Dutch securities seemed to him less attractive than those of Austria, so he placed the Duke's money in the latter quarter. Years afterwards, when Marlborough was dead, the Duchess brought an action at law against him for not carrying out his instruction, and forced







BLENHEIM PALACE.

From a lithograph



him to make good the loss. It is quite certain the Duke would not have sanctioned such a proceeding.

On the 28th of November, Marlborough sailed for Ostend, leaving the Duchess at St. Albans. He was accompanied by two gentlemen and a few servants. He wanted quiet, and, by a strange irony, that was impossible in England. The Ministry breathed freely when he sailed, though Oxford and St. John, who were now absolutely at cross-purposes, were not a little anxious as to how Marlborough would act in the event of the Queen's death—an event which was not likely to be long delayed. They had done their worst, so far as the Duke was concerned; it remained to be seen how he would act when the rival claims of the House of Stuart and the House of Hanover came up for final decision. Marlborough went abroad in 1712 free and unsaddled with responsibility. His life had been strenuous as well as splendid, and he turned his back on public affairs with almost the zest of a youth who had escaped from school. If his own inclinations had been studied, all ceremony would have been waived when he landed; but whatever his enemies in England might think, the magic of his name was still resistless in the region where he had won his greatest victories. He was received everywhere with marked distinction. At Ostend the Duke's arrival was greeted with a salute of artillery. The garrison was paraded, and the Governor entertained him at a banquet. Next day he left for Antwerp, where he was welcomed with military honours. The same reception awaited him at Maestricht, and all the way to Aix-la-Chapelle, where he intended to take up his residence, the enthusiasm of the people was unbounded. At the hour when fortune had ceased to smile upon him in England, they paid him as much honour as if he were still at the height of his triumphs. The common people



said of Marlborough when he was in exile in 1712-1714—and no finer compliment could well have been accorded to him:

“The only things the Duke has forgotten are his own deeds. The only things His Grace remembers are the misfortunes of others; his looks, his bearing, and his address, are full as conquering as his sword.”<sup>1</sup>

He made the same impression on men of consequence by his kindness, his consideration for others, his grave gentle bearing, the resistless charm of his manner. It was the Duc de Les Diguères who, on quitting the Duke’s crowded levée at Aix-la-Chapelle, declared:

“I can now say that I have seen the man who is equal to the Maréchal de Turenne in conduct, the old Prince de Condé in courage, and superior to the Maréchal de Luxembourg in success.”<sup>2</sup>

The Duchess had intended to follow the Duke abroad in the course of a fortnight or three weeks, but it was two months before she was able to join him. His letters to her reveal his loneliness, as well as his ardent wish that she should hasten her journey. He told her that the sea was calm and the roads as good as in summer, and that he was waiting until he “had the happiness of her company” to push on to Frankfort. He wanted to get to that city in order to settle for a time, as he said, into an orderly way of living, and added: “If you are then contented, I shall have nothing to trouble me.”

He desired her, in passing through Brussels, to call on M. De Vost, in order to look at the “hangings,” as he modestly called the glorious tapestries which now adorn the walls of Blenheim. Josse De Vost was the most renowned and skilful artist in tapestry, not merely in Flanders, but in Europe. He had estab-

<sup>1</sup> Alison, “Life of Marlborough.”

<sup>2</sup> Lediard, “Life of Marlborough,” vol. iii., p. 301.

lished his looms at Brussels in the summer of 1705, and had been already granted various privileges by the city, in recognition of the superlative merit of his work. The Emperor Leopold was one of De Vost's patrons, and a fine example of his skill in tapestry was one of the artistic treasures of the Imperial Palace of Vienna. Almost as soon as the walls of Blenheim began to rise, the Duke determined that De Vost should depict his battles upon them. He seems to have given the artist his first commission in 1706, and since then the flying shuttles had been busy, weaving many-coloured threads into the magnificent and realistic pictures which, for wellnigh two centuries, have graced the state apartments at Blenheim:

"The vivid tints with war's dread horrors burn;  
Here Grief and Shame—there, Rage and Fury turn;  
The lengthen'd march—the ramparts rise to sight,  
And all the kindling glories of the fight."

De Vost not merely had the Duke's explicit descriptions to guide him in the preparation of these historic tapestries, but the original plans of the battles and sieges, showing the disposition of the troops, as well as portraits of the chief soldiers depicted, were placed at his disposal. It is the realistic fidelity in every detail, no less than the artistic beauty, of the Blenheim tapestries, which commands admiration, and the circumstance that they are almost contemporary with the battles and sieges depicted immeasurably enhances their historic appeal.

The stranger, passing through the state apartments of the palace, is confronted by these glowing and realistic pictures of the attack on Donauwerth, the siege of Lille, the battles of Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, the march to Bouchain, and the siege of that fortified town. It is significant that perhaps the finest tapestry of all, which depicts the Battle of Blenheim, was placed by the Duchess in

the private apartments. De Vost's masterpiece enriches the walls of the bow-window room, where Marlborough in old age used to sit and watch the plays given for his entertainment by his grandchildren and friends. This favourite room of the first Duke and Duchess is comparatively small, and the glorious tapestry, in consequence, representing the battle which gave occasion for the house, is placed at a disadvantage, since it extends across two walls at right angles; but the Duchess determined its position, and it has never been changed. She wished the tapestry that represented the battle which made the Duke immortal to decorate the room where she constantly sat. The story runs that a French officer who visited Blenheim generations ago, enraged at the account which was given him, on the spot, of Marlborough's historic victory, flashed out his sword and slashed at the picture. It was skilfully repaired, and bears no traces to-day of that act of vandalism.

Early in February, 1713, the Duchess reached Maestricht, where she and the Duke remained for a few days. She was accompanied to Dover, when she set out on her journey, by her kinsman, Mr. Robert Jennings, a wealthy lawyer in London, who was connected with the Court. Whilst she was abroad she wrote to him a number of letters, which were published, from the original manuscripts at Madresfield Court, and a few citations of interest are given, since Lord Beauchamp has placed the volume at the writer's disposal. The first was written immediately on her arrival at Maestricht, and is dated the 12th of February. After thanking Mr. Jennings for his kindness in escorting her to Dover, the Duchess says:

"All the places one passes through in these parts have an air very different from London. The most considerable people I have seen have but just enough

to live, and the ordinary people I believe are half starved; but they are all so good and so civil that I could not help wishing that they had the riches and the liberties that our wise countrymen have thrown away, or, at best, put in great danger."

She adds that the "honours paid her at every halting-place, as the Duke of Marlborough's wife, were not to be imagined." She was gratified by it all the more because he was not in authority. "It shows that he made a right use of power when he was a general," and she thinks that her kinsman will see what people abroad think of the Ministry.

On the 1st of March the Duke and Duchess made a short stay at Aix-la-Chapelle. She tells her relative that she is spending her time in that city in visiting convents and churches, and that the abuses of the priests, and especially the extortions which they practised on the "poor deluded people," move her to indignation. In the middle of May the Duke and Duchess settled at Frankfort for a time, where Marlborough had an opportunity of exchanging confidences with Prince Eugene. The Duchess sat at a window as the troops under the Prince's command marched past, and she wished that she were a man, that she might fight also "in the glorious cause of liberty." The soldiers saluted the Duke as they went by, "as if he had been at his old post." She describes the court which was paid to Marlborough, and says "it would fill a book" to give an account of all the honours done to him by the Elector of Mayence and other notables. In a subsequent letter from Frankfort, the Duchess refers to Lord Godolphin. She cannot write about the best friend she ever had in her life "without dropping some tears." She declares that he managed, not merely her own affairs, but those of the nation, and might "truly be compared to Aristides for honesty and care of the public good." She

says, "you have seen how Lord Godolphin was used," and declares that she has often thought that, "if it were not for the satisfaction of one's own mind, as far as it concerns this world, it is much better to be wicked than good."

She gives a delightful picture of her country walks with the Duke. They drove out of the city every afternoon, and stopped the coach when the road seemed inviting.

"FRANKFORT,  
"May 16.

"T'other day we were walking from the road, and a gentleman and his lady went by us in his chariot, whom we had never seen before, and after passing us with the usual civilities they bethought themselves and turned back, came out of their coach to us, and desired that we would go into their garden, which was very near that place, desiring us to accept of a key. This is only a little taste of the civility of people abroad, and I could not help thinking that we might have walked in England as far as our feet would have carried us before anybody that we had never seen before would have lighted out of their coach to have entertained us."<sup>1</sup>

There are passing allusions in the letters to La Guerre's work in the decoration of Marlborough House, and to affairs at Woodstock. She says that the Duke has grown "intolerable lazy," and has not written once to any of his daughters in England. She offers to buy lace for Mistress Jennings.

"If she will employ me, pray assure her that I will take as much care to serve her well, as I did the Queen, whom I had the honour to save a hundred thousand pounds in nine years, which I can prove to anybody."<sup>2</sup>

The Duchess thought Frankfort an agreeable town, but expressed her surprise that a country so long

<sup>1</sup> "Letters of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, from the Original Manuscripts at Madresfield Court." London, 1875.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

civilized should lack all the conveniences of life. She was there in the winter, and detested their "intolerable stoves." The most beautiful place she saw in her travels was the castle of the Elector of Treves, at the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle. He received his distinguished guests with marked honours. She was not in the least impressed with the religious processions which she saw abroad. It seemed to her that they had a "folly for almost every day in the year."

It is plain that the Duchess looked askance at the negotiations with France. She at least stood clear of all the intrigues which were in progress in regard to the Pretender. In a letter from Frankfort, written in July, 1713, occur the significant words:

"Be sure nothing can stand before the King of France long, if England continues to assist him; and, as long as this ministry continues, I think there is no doubt that England will act (do) what is most for the advantage of the French in all things, which must certainly a little sooner or later bring in the Prince of Wales."<sup>1</sup>

Just before that letter was written the Duchess had met at Frankfort a Roman Catholic gentleman, whom the Duke had befriended at a critical juncture in his private fortunes. The Duchess describes him as "very honest in his way." He told her that he expected the restoration of King James as a certainty, and desired her as a friend to try to "bring the Duke of Marlborough early" into a project, which was then ripening, with that end. The Duchess replied proudly, "I had much rather have the Duke suffer upon that account than change sides, for that would look as if what he did at the Revolution was not for justice, as it really was, but to comply with the times."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Madresfield Letters.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

The Duke seized the opportunity presented by his residence in Germany to take the Duchess to the Principality of Mindelheim, where he was welcomed with stately ceremonials as a Prince of the Empire. By one of life's little ironies, Marlborough, in spite of his great services to the Court of Vienna, was not long allowed to enjoy the revenues of the principality, which had been conferred upon him by the Emperor Leopold in recognition of his victory of Blenheim. He retained the rank of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, and this title of Prince was confirmed by Charles VI., and extended to heirs female.

Whilst the Duke and Duchess were still abroad, tidings of a great personal sorrow reached them. They had been cheered by lively letters from their children, but early in 1714, whilst at Antwerp, news came to them of the death of their third daughter, Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater. She was struck down by smallpox, and, after a short illness, died on the 22nd of March, in the twenty-sixth year of her age. The Countess of Bridgewater was the child of all others whom Marlborough adored, and her death moved him deeply. It was said in her lifetime that Lady Bridgewater threw herself into the gaiety of the Court without sharing its follies, and was the "best of wives." She was also a singularly dutiful and affectionate daughter, endowed with a sunny temper and great charm of character. When the tidings came, the Duke dropped his head heavily on the marble mantelpiece, by which he was standing, and fell in a swoon. It seemed just then as if all things were in conspiracy to break the Duke's spirit, but the fortitude which had served him so well in battle did not desert him when assailed by "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

During the closing months of his residence in Germany he had been in close communication with

the Court of Hanover, and had finally dropped, in 1713, his previous political relations with his nephew, the Duke of Berwick, on behalf of "James III.," as the Jacobites termed the Pretender. If Prince James Stuart had consented to abandon his fervid Roman Catholicism, Marlborough would unquestionably have done all in his power to advance his cause. But the Prince was a truly religious man, and "not for three crowns" would he consent either to cloak or to dissemble his real convictions. Marlborough beyond all else was a Protestant, and he knew, moreover, that a Roman Catholic King of England was impossible. Besides, the Pretender was hand in glove with Louis XIV., and it was the lifelong ambition of Marlborough to break the power of France. The Duke made it clear in his secret correspondence with Berwick, as far back as the years 1708-09, that he would always oppose the power of France, and would do nothing for the Pretender against the "interests of England."<sup>1</sup> He was prepared to exchange compliments with him, and to make guarded statements, but he was not prepared to pledge himself at all hazards to bring about the restoration of the House of Stuart. No one could predict what would happen in England after Anne's death, but when the Pretender expressly declared that under no circumstances whatever would he change his faith, Marlborough seems to have recognized that nothing further was possible, and hence he pledged his sword and life to the Hanoverian cause. His sympathies were with the Stuarts, but, since both his convictions and his interests, and, as he judged, the interests of the Protestant Faith in England as well, were with the House of Hanover, he determined to stand by the Electress.

Almost as soon as this decision had been reached,

<sup>1</sup> "Une Négociation Inconnue entre Berwick et Marlborough" (1708-09 Ed.). A Legrelle. Ghent, 1893.



tidings arrived in the early summer of 1714 that the Queen's health was rapidly failing. In July the Duke determined to return to England, in order to be on the spot when the crisis arose. If a steam-packet had been at his service in those days, Marlborough would have been in London when the Queen died. But he was detained by contrary winds at the port of departure, and reached Dover on the 1st of August, the very day when the sceptre fell from Anne's hands. He was too late to have a voice in the sudden and dramatic Council of Kensington, which ended, after a few hours of suspense—when the rival claims of the Pretender and the Elector hovered in the balance—with the command to the heralds to proclaim in the streets of the capital the accession of George I.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LAST YEARS OF MARLBOROUGH

THERE is scarcely a more dramatic chapter in the annals of England than that which closed with the death of Queen Anne. The Duke and Duchess were spectators at a distance of the rivalry between Oxford and Bolingbroke, which not merely embittered Her Majesty's last days, but provoked the fit of apoplexy which, after an angry Council prolonged till midnight at Kensington, proved fatal. Marlborough was absent from England from the autumn of 1712 to the summer of 1714, and had neither part nor lot in the unseemly wrangles which brought about so tragic an issue. Within that interval England made terms with France at Utrecht, which satisfied neither Holland nor Austria. The Dutch, after prolonged negotiations, were conciliated by a strong barrier of fortresses, which secured their frontiers from invasion. But even when the Peace of Utrecht was signed by both England and Holland, France had still to reckon with the hostility of Austria, and the struggle went on for a time on unequal terms. When the armistice was proclaimed, England laid down her arms on the 6th of June, 1712, much to the chagrin of Marlborough. The foreign troops, who had served under the Duke, joined the standard of Prince Eugene. They refused to obey the Duke of Ormonde's orders, and even the English soldiers who followed him to Dunkirk were sullen and indignant. Eugene, deserted by Ormonde, who was acting under

instructions from the Ministry, boldly pursued the plan of campaign which Marlborough and himself had concerted in the previous year. Immediately after the capture of Quesnoy, the Prince marched his army to Landrecies, along what the troops proudly called "the road to Paris." The reduction of this fortified town had been Marlborough's ambition at the very moment when his victorious career was stayed, for he knew that, if he held Landrecies, the Allies could march to the gates of Paris and dictate terms to Louis XIV.

Prince Eugene determined to carry out the broken purpose of the great soldier. It was a supreme and gallant effort on the part of Eugene, who was as brave a soldier and as loyal a comrade as ever led a charge in battle. But the reign of terror which the Duke's renown had created in France no longer existed. He was not now at the seat of war, and Versailles breathed freely. The song with which women all over France rocked their babes in the cradle to sleep, "*Malbrook s'en va-t-en Guerre*," though it survived on their lips for more than one generation, was already no longer a spell. The moment the armistice was signed Louis sent the garrisons from every town which was no longer threatened to strengthen the army of Marshal Villars. He was the most able commander in the King's service, and, with Marlborough gone—smarting under the defeat at Malplaquet—he saw his chance, and Eugene, disheartened and outnumbered, was no match for him. Villars threw the Prince off his guard by a demonstration in force against the army which threatened Landrecies, and under cover of it, by a sudden and masterly movement, attacked the Dutch at Denain, where the Earl of Albemarle was posted to protect the rear of the besieging host. Eugene hastened at once to the aid of Albemarle, but Villars cut the bridge across the

Scheldt, and on the 24th of July was victorious after a fierce struggle. In consequence the Allies were forced to raise the siege of Landrecies, and Villars pushed his advantage so cleverly that Douay surrendered. Quesnoy was recaptured, and on the 10th of October the campaign ended with the surrender of Bouchain, which Marlborough had taken so brilliantly in the summer of the previous year.

With the fall of Bouchain, the War of the Spanish Succession, so far as its operations have been followed in these pages, came to an end, but it was one which rankled in the heart of Marlborough. That end might have been far different if the Duke had not been deprived of his command, or even if Prince Eugene had been properly supported after his removal. It was a weak and impotent conclusion—the outcome of England's deliberate betrayal of the Allies. It seemed to Marlborough, when the tidings came to him, that he had laboured in vain and spent his strength for naught.

England had called a truce to battle exclusively in her own interests and in defiance of her treaty obligations. Almost everything that had been won at the point of the sword on the northern frontier of France was relinquished at the very moment when Europe expected the Allies to deliver a crushing and final blow to the pretensions of Louis XIV. Even the original purpose of a war on which so much blood and treasure had been spent was abandoned, for a Prince of the House of Bourbon was henceforth allowed to wear the crown of Spain. The secret history of the negotiations form one of the most shameful episodes in the annals of England. Marlborough had nothing to do with it; it was Oxford and Bolingbroke, the statesmen who compassed his downfall, who were directly responsible for what Pitt afterwards denounced as "this indelible reproach

on the foreign policy of the nation." Peace, on terms far more advantageous, as well as honourable, than that which was concluded at Utrecht would have been arranged if another twelve months had been granted to Marlborough. But he was hounded down, just as he was preparing to strike the final blow, with the aid of unscrupulous writers like Swift. It is true that the cost of the war had grown menacing; it is equally clear that the nation was restive and discontented at its prolongation, and partly because it was, of necessity, in ignorance of Marlborough's proposed *coup de grâce* to France at the gates of Paris. But the nation would have waited patiently if discontent and suspicion had not been sedulously fomented by the astounding charges against Marlborough, for, unlike the Whig party, it was not prepared for peace on humiliating terms.

Oxford and Bolingbroke acted like gamblers engaged in a game of chance. Any moment the Queen might collapse, and after her came the deluge. They had both intrigued deeply with the Pretender, and they knew perfectly well, in doing so, that, in spite of declarations to the contrary from the Throne, they had the secret good-will of the Queen. Anne detested the House of Hanover, and did not wish the strong-brained, domineering old Electress to become her successor. The Queen felt the call of her blood. She had always been more or less inspired by sentimental regret for the part which she had played at the Revolution. She desired to make tardy reparation for what she now deemed her desertion of her father's cause, by paving the way for her young brother to gain the crown when her own lonely and embittered life was ended.

The Queen, in the closing years of her reign, was between cross-fires. On parchments and in proclamations she was pledged to Hanover; at heart she seems

to have longed, though with perplexed misgivings, that the ancient line of Soveriegns should not be set aside. Lady Masham was a pronounced Jacobite, who, in season and out, was never weary of extolling the virtues as well as the claims of the Chevalier de St. George. The Duchess of Somerset, on the contrary, stoutly held that the Act of Settlement, made in 1701 in favour of Hanover, ought to be respected, and harped on the old cry, "The Church in danger!" well knowing that Anne was the obedient daughter of the Church. At the time when affairs grew critical, Bolingbroke was much more to the mind of Lady Masham than Oxford. A finished courtier, Bolingbroke masked his inordinate ambition under gay repartees. He had a handsome face, was skilled in compliment, and had few scruples. Oxford was not prepossessing, was slow and embarrassed of speech, and much given to mysterious and vacillating statements. When he was raised to the peerage, an old dancing-master in London declared that he was at a loss to understand what the Queen saw in the Lord Treasurer, since he was the greatest dunce whom he had ever tried to teach the quadrille. It was Bolingbroke—the only prominent statesman in office at the time who was an accomplished linguist—who had the last word, so far as England was concerned, in the Peace of Utrecht, which was concluded in March, 1713. He had a great deal more to do with its stipulations than Oxford, and, as he was more ardent for the Stuart cause, the Queen, though scandalized by his private life, gave him her confidence.

France had good reason to be satisfied with its terms. They were far better than Louis XIV. had dared to dream; he had been prepared to make concessions at Gertruydenburg which were not now demanded. When it was signed—a straw shows how the wind was blowing—Louis, who was perfectly

aware of Anne's fondness for dress and good living, sent her a personal present of six splendid gowns and more than two thousand bottles of champagne.

The Peace of Utrecht confirmed the right to the throne of Spain of the grandson of Louis XIV. Louis acknowledged, with his tongue in his cheek, the Protestant Succession, well aware that Anne detested the House of Hanover. True to his cynical maxim, "*Après moi le déluge*," he relinquished his claims to Nova Scotia and other castles in the air across the Atlantic. Spain had to make more costly concessions. Philip kept the Indies, but yielded to his old rival for the Crown, the Emperor Charles, his possessions in Italy and the Netherlands, and made peace with the Duke of Savoy by ceding Sicily. Spain relinquished to England not merely Minorca, but Gibraltar, which made this nation mistress of the Mediterranean; whilst Holland obtained a line of barrier fortresses which delivered the Dutch from their fears. France undertook to drive the Pretender from her territory, and the brave Catalans were left to their fate under Charles V. Austria, after Utrecht, was forced by the logic of events to the conclusion that it was useless to continue the struggle.

Peace was signed in 1714 between the Emperor Joseph and Louis XIV. at Rastadt, and the men who signed it were the two soldiers who last crossed swords in the war—Prince Eugene and Marshal Villars. The air was gradually clearing. Just before the Peace of Rastadt the old Electress Sophia of Hanover died suddenly at Herrnhäusen, on the 9th of June, 1714, at the age of eighty-four, and her son, the new Elector, was free to form a close alliance with the Whigs. If she had lived a few weeks longer, her avowed ambition to add "*Queen of England*" to the inscription on her coffin might have been gratified.

The negotiations which led to this result were carried on by secret emissaries, who made the journey between London and Versailles under assumed names. The Allies were kept in the dark, though England, as the predominant partner in the Grand Alliance, was pledged to enter into no compact with France, except "jointly and in concert" with the other Powers involved in the struggle. Both before and after Malplaquet, France had made overtures for peace which had been contemptuously spurned. Louis wanted it after the Battle of Ramillies in 1706, but at that time the hopes of the Allies ran high, and they would not listen to his proposals. In 1709 he sent his Foreign Minister, Torcy, to The Hague, to try and bring the Dutch to terms, and it was on that occasion, knowing that the last word was with Marlborough, that he attempted to bribe the Duke.

Then came the abortive Conference at Gertruydenburg in 1710, when France was prepared to humble herself in the dust if only peace were gained. Now the ball was suddenly at her feet. It is recorded that when the Abbé Gaultier—a secret political agent of France in London with whom Oxford had been intriguing whilst Marlborough was still fighting—appeared at the French Court in January, 1711, he asked Torcy whether the King wanted peace, since England, to his knowledge, was willing to come to terms. Torcy replied that "to ask a Minister of His Majesty at that time whether he wanted peace was to ask a man, ill of a protracted and grievous malady, whether he wanted to be well."<sup>1</sup> So the tortuous and protracted negotiations began which culminated at Utrecht. Three persons were opposed to the negotiations. Marlborough, Prince Eugene, and Heinsius, persisted in their desire to crush Louis, but the forces arrayed against them were too powerful. Louis

<sup>1</sup> Torcy, "Journal," 1709-1711.



thought that fortune had deserted him, and that the great reign was to end in untold disaster. He could not complain of his luck in 1713, for England was as anxious as he was for peace, and conceded it on terms which were much more advantageous to France than those which previously had been rejected.

Yet, in the very year in which the peace was concluded, Oxford and Bolingbroke, in spite of their ostentatious and public declaration in the treaty about the Protestant Succession in England and the expulsion of the Pretender from France, were secretly plotting to secure the throne for him in the event of the Queen's death. They made the Duke of Ormonde, who was a notorious Jacobite, Warden of Dover, and placed other prominent Jacobites in authority in Ireland and Scotland. But in the summer of 1713 they began to quarrel openly, and, when their antagonism presently ripened, Bolingbroke, who had the Queen's ear, triumphed by cleverly bringing the more violent Tories and the more extreme High Churchmen over to his side. He made himself the champion of the iniquitous Schism Act, which was passed in the spring of 1714, and Oxford, who stoutly opposed it, was dismissed from office. Bolingbroke was instantly appointed Prime Minister, and the game seemed in his hand. Oxford by this time, as the Stuart Papers reveal, had cooled towards the Pretender, and was paying assiduous court to the House of Hanover. Men said at the time, that whichever Prince appeared first in London after the Queen's death would gain the crown. But that event came suddenly, when Bolingbroke was engaged in the task of forming a Cabinet, and all his plans were thrown into confusion.

The Queen had carried about with her for years a secret packet, with which she never parted by day or by night. It was believed to contain her real wishes

in regard to the succession. It was found under her pillow when she died at Kensington, and, by order of Shrewsbury and other Lords of the Council, was thrown unopened into the fire. Whatever that mysterious packet contained, Anne hoped against hope that her brother would ascend to the throne as James III. Bolingbroke seems to the last to have played a waiting game. James would have landed in Scotland in the Queen's lifetime if Bolingbroke had not deemed such a movement too risky. He thought that the Elector was inevitable, but that England would soon grow weary of him, and that then it would be possible to organize the Jacobite movement and drive him from the throne. But he seems to have forgotten that he had to reckon with Shrewsbury and the Whig leaders, and their prompt action on the last day of the Queen's life caused all his schemes to miscarry and drove him into exile. He had been racing against time, and his chagrin is reflected in a letter to Swift, dated the 3rd of August, which is historic: "The Earl of Oxford was removed on Tuesday; the Queen died on Sunday! What a world is this and how does fortune banter us!"

Two days after that letter was written Marlborough arrived in London, and in his progress through the streets met with a perfect triumph. Two years earlier the Duke's coach had been followed by a hostile crowd, and the great soldier had been assailed with expressions of contempt. The populace at that time were gulled by the slanders which were heaped upon Marlborough in high places, and had accepted the false charges which were made against him by Oxford and Bolingbroke in Parliament, and by Swift, and a host of less brilliant, but equally malicious, writers in the Press. Since then the tide had turned, and the two statesmen who had so bitterly traduced him were seen in their true colours. One had been

contemptuously dismissed from office, and the other, though he had been the chief instrument in bringing about the Peace of Utrecht, stood revealed as the arch-plotter for the Roman Catholic Prince who had long been toasted in Jacobite gatherings as "James III."

As the Duke's coach, on the 5th of August, 1714, made its way to Marlborough House, escorted by a great retinue of gentlemen on horseback, the citizens greeted it with loud cries of "Long live King George! Long live the Duke of Marlborough!" The conjunction of the new King's name with that of the man whom the late Queen had discarded when at the height of his renown was significant. It revealed a great change in popular sentiment towards the Duke, and it becomes necessary to ask what had happened, not so much in England as abroad, since 1712. A great deal that was hidden then is known to-day, through the publication of the Stuart and Hanover Papers. There was not a man in the realm in the last two years of the reign of Queen Anne, however highly placed, alert, and well informed, who was acquainted with the whole of the tangled web of intrigue which, until the last moment, imperilled the Brunswick Succession. Statesmen, diplomatists, envoys, open or unacknowledged, and a crowd of spies, who ran to the rival Courts in ambush, knew parts of the story. But all these people, high and low, were divided into hostile camps, anyone might be impeached, or even lose his head, if he divulged the information which he possessed. There was, in short, outside the two narrow and jealously guarded circles of the extreme Jacobites and the perfervid Hanoverians, a conspiracy of silence.

The rank and file of the Jacobites knew part of the story in its broad outlines; their leaders, who were actively engaged in negotiations with the Pretender,

of course knew more. The Whigs as a party were in sympathy with the Elector, and the clubs and coffee-houses were alive with political rumours more or less well founded; but the Whig statesmen, who were not less busy on behalf of Hanover than their Tory rivals, were extremely reticent, lest their plans at the last moment might miscarry. In spite of all this, the great mass of the people, who did not trouble themselves deeply with such high things, had an inkling of the trend of affairs—at all events, after Oxford's dismissal. Hence, when they saw the soldier, whose downfall he had compassed, in the capital as the new reign began, they jumped to conclusions, and linked his name in their plaudits with that of the King. They were wiser than they knew. Marlborough, whilst abroad, had pledged both his sword and his life to the Electress Sophia, and had received a provisional order to place himself at the head of the army in the event of Anne's death. He was not lavish with money; indeed, one of the most common charges against him is that of parsimony, though it rests on slender evidence. He had known in his early days what it was to want money, and, like other self-made men, he handled it to the last carefully. But he could be lavish on occasion, and when the Electoral Prince, who was both poor and niggardly, required funds for political purposes in England, it was the Duke who placed £20,000 at his disposal, in the autumn of 1713.

It is significant that the first State document signed by George I., on the 6th of August, 1714, was the appointment of Marlborough to his old post of Captain-General of the Forces, which may be set against the fact, of which a great deal has been made, that the Duke's name was not on the list of peers who were appointed to act as regents until the King's arrival. Nearly all the accusations brought against

Marlborough resolve themselves into the charge of double-dealing. In a certain sense it is true, but, apart from the lax ethical standards of the period, there are other considerations which need to be borne in mind. One is that nobody knew what would happen on the death of Anne, and, in consequence, nearly every prominent man of that epoch was inclined to adopt the attitude taken up in a familiar song by "The Vicar of Bray." Almost all of the statesmen who had lived through the Revolution, and did not know whether it would last, halted between two opinions. Not a few of them vacillated more than Marlborough, and the most adroit in such unscrupulous political intrigues were Oxford and Bolingbroke.

The worst that can be said against the Duke, and it is only fair that it should be admitted, rests on the authority of the Stuart Papers. Briefly stated, it amounts to this: He wanted a pardon from the Pretender in March, 1714; he promised two years later to do what he could for the Prince. The request for a pardon reveals Marlborough partly as a man of sentiment, as he assuredly was, and, for the rest, it was prompted by prudential reasons, since he did not wish to be ruined if—as seemed likely in the spring of 1714—James succeeded to the throne. As regards the assurance that he would do what he could for the Prince in 1716—and it must be borne in mind that the statement rests entirely on the testimony of Menzies, a notorious Jacobite spy—stands the indisputable fact that Marlborough took vigorous military steps to suppress the Jacobite Rising of 1715. But, apart from all this, both the Stuart Papers and the recently-published "*Une Négociation Inconnue entre Berwick et Marlborough*" conclusively prove that the Duke habitually adopted a non-committal attitude. The two points on which he stood firm were

that he would never consent to do anything to place James upon the throne so long as he was a Roman Catholic or relied on the armed intervention of Louis XIV. He refused to go to the French Court when he was abroad, even though Anne held out the hope of a return to her favour if he consented to take that step. He had spent his life in warring against Louis XIV., and he was far too proud a man to seek an audience at Versailles after all his victories over France.

His recently-published letters to Berwick, in 1708-09, go far to clear his reputation, for in them he explicitly declares that he will do nothing against the Protestant Succession. When James, to his credit, definitely refused either to renounce or even conceal his religious convictions, Marlborough, though with a heavy heart, saw that his succession was impossible. He still kept up communications with Berwick for a time; but it is plain that from the autumn of 1713 the Jacobites were suspicious of him. He replied to their overtures in vague and bantering terms; they ceased to give him their confidence, though they tried their best, as Berwick put it to James, "to keep civil with him." The simple truth was that Marlborough was now, as Berwick afterwards reported to James, "omnipotent with the Elector." The Duke's ruling thought was always the interests of England, and chief amongst its interests, in his conviction, was the Protestant Succession. It was on that rock that he split with the Prince who styled himself "James III."

As early as 1708 Marlborough was aware that the English people, who never really cared for William III., did not relish the prospect of another foreign ruler. He knew also that the Electoral Prince was jealous of his own military renown and personal popularity, and both of these facts need to be borne in mind in

any attempt to understand the Duke's vacillation. But he never swerved from what he told the Duke of Berwick in that year, which was that he was desirous of serving Prince James if he could do it "*sans préjudice de l'intérêt de la nation*," but that at all hazards he was opposed to anything that would forward the designs of France. He recognized in the last days of Queen Anne, when the Chevalier publicly announced that nothing would induce him to abandon Roman Catholicism, that it was impossible, "*sans préjudice de l'intérêt de la nation*," to take any steps for the restoration of the son of James II. If the Prince, as at one time seemed likely, abandoned a religion to which the majority of the English people were opposed, Marlborough, it is clear, would have lent him his sword. He was willing, so he put it, to throw in his lot with James with all his heart the moment he was persuaded that it would be "*pour le bien de mon pays*," but he expressly added that that time would only come "*quand le Roi sera appelé par la nation*."<sup>1</sup>

Marlborough's position was perfectly clear and logical. He was sincerely attached to the Stuarts. He had won his spurs as a young officer under Charles II.; his earliest victories as a commander had been won under James II.; his historic triumphs in arms had been gained under Queen Anne; but he would do nothing to imperil the Protestant Succession or to bring about what he regarded as a dangerous alliance with France. He was indignant at the Treaty of Utrecht, and all the more because he regarded it as dishonourable to England and a positive breach of faith with the Allies. He knew, moreover—or, if he did not know, he suspected—that, when Anne's death took place, Louis XIV. would hold that part of the

<sup>1</sup> "*Une Négociation Inconnue entre Berwick et Marlborough*" (1709-09), by A. Legrelle.

treaty which tied his hands as to the Pretender as no longer binding, and that was what actually took place. It was these considerations which led Marlborough to throw in his lot with the House of Hanover, and not, as has been so often contended, any paltry question of self-interest.

How well he served the cause of the Elector stands revealed in the Hanover Papers. Like almost every other woman of the period, the old Electress Sophia admired Marlborough. She not merely admired, but trusted him, and had she lived to ascend the English throne, and to achieve her expressed ambition that "Queen of England" might be inscribed on her coffin, it is not open to doubt that the Duke would have played a great part in what, of necessity, must have been a short, though probably a memorable, reign. Marlborough strongly urged upon the Court of Hanover that the Duke of Cambridge, the Elector's son, who afterwards reigned as George II., should proceed to England in Queen Anne's lifetime and take his seat in the House of Lords. He thought, in common with all who wished well to Hanover, that the young Prince's presence in England as ultimate heir to the throne would in itself tend to defeat the intrigues of the Jacobites; but Queen Anne, like other less illustrious personages, could not bear to think of her own departure from the scene, and when the proposal was made to her she peremptorily vetoed it, declaring that it would be like stepping down from the throne. Oddly enough, the Duke of Berwick, as the Stuart Papers show—under date of the 18th of August, 1713—was strongly in favour of a similar scheme, though with Prince James, instead of Prince George, as the chief actor. He thought that the Pretender should go to England; he believed that the Queen would welcome him, and that he ought to accompany her at the opening of Parliament.



His plan was that Anne should divulge to the assembled Lords and Commons her agreement with the Prince, and "desire their concurrence in the matter." Berwick was sanguine enough to think that the English were "so fickle" that, if the Queen and the Prince took Parliament by storm in this fashion, all would go well. He proposed, in other words, which have since become historic, to "dish the Whigs" and ruin the Elector's chance of the throne; but Queen Anne wanted neither of them, and cautious Abbé Gaultier was forced to report to Berwick that Her Majesty was of opinion that her brother must not stir from Lorraine.

The Queen, like her statesmen, was in two minds. The Jacobites were convinced that she wanted to "pay her debts," which was the term they used when speaking of the Queen's wish to secure her brother's succession. Mrs. Masham was clearly doing all in her power for James, and the Stuart Papers show that she had, Bolingbroke apart, an important ally. Berwick reports, as late as the 1st of March, 1714, to James: "The Archbishop of York is daily speaking of the matter to the Queen, declaring that she cannot hope for salvation unless she does all that lies in her." As Anne's thoughts were constantly turning now to her father and now to her brother, his words had great weight with her. But Oxford shook his head, and the Duchess of Somerset, who was in the interests of Hanover, frowned, and the poor Queen—she was indulging too freely in alcoholic drinks at this time—sat in her lonely apartments at St. James's baffled and irresolute amid such cross-fires. Harley's attitude annoyed the Jacobites beyond words. He had spoken them fair for so long, but when matters became critical he grew evasive. Berwick began to suspect that he was a "knave at bottom," a man of "dark and incomprehensive"

mind, who was playing, in spite of all his protestations, a deep and waiting game. It was on Bolingbroke that they pinned their hope, and when he ousted his rival from power they were jubilant. Both Oxford and Bolingbroke, less than three months before the Queen died, verbally assured the Abbé Gaultier that they would "never serve nor have any master" save James. A month later the Duke of Ormonde declared that the Stuart prospects were good "if Queen Anne did not leave James too soon in the lurch." All that Berwick could say when the Queen's life was waning was that James must make a virtue of necessity and have patience. He said: "Matters are in such a ferment that all the world stands gaping."

The Hanoverian Succession was brought about by Shrewsbury, Somerset, and Argyle. The Duchess of Marlborough used to say that Shrewsbury had more influence with the Queen in her last days than anyone else, except Harley and Mrs. Masham. The Queen made much of him, and, when he pretended to be lame with gout, would send her own sedan and have him carried up the stairs of the palace into her presence. He succeeded to the place which Somers formerly had in her confidence, and it was into his hands, at the instance of Somerset and Argyle, that Her Majesty, when dying, gave the Lord Treasurer's wand, with the pathetic request that he would use it in the best interests of the nation. That act overthrew, at the last moment, the Bolingbroke scheme for the restoration of the Stuarts, and set the trumpets blowing a few hours later for George I.

Marlborough's splendid constitution was impaired when he returned to England in 1714. The Duchess declared shortly afterwards that the Duke's life was in actual jeopardy if he were not set free from care.

She herself had no longer any ambition to play a great part at Court. She threw herself on her knees and begged the Duke to take upon himself no more responsibilities. It was a gratification to Marlborough that General Cadogan, who had fought by his side through the War of the Spanish Succession, and had thrown up his appointment when the Duke was dismissed, was appointed Master of the Horse. Cadogan was the soldier who, beyond any other, had Marlborough's confidence, and it is probable that he would not have resumed his command if his trusty lieutenant, who in due time was to succeed him as Commander-in-Chief, had not been taken back into favour. If the Duke had followed his own inclination, he would have retired from supreme command at sixty-six ; but Lord Sunderland joined his persuasions to those of all his old friends, who earnestly wished that the hero of Blenheim should die in harness. If any proof is needed that Marlborough stood high at the new Court, it is shown by the honours that were paid to the family. The Earl of Bridgewater was appointed Chamberlain to the Household of the Prince of Wales ; another son-in-law, Lord Godolphin, was restored to his old office at Court ; the Duke of Montagu was given a regiment, and his Duchess was gazetted Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales ; whilst Lord Sunderland, somewhat to his own chagrin, was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, a post which he afterwards exchanged for that of Secretary of State.

In 1715 Marlborough took energetic steps to suppress the Jacobite Rebellion—his last service to the nation as a soldier ; but it was already clear to himself, as well as to others, that his fighting days were over. In the following spring came the final sorrow of his life ; his second daughter, Anne, Countess of Sunderland, died at Althorp on the 15th of April, 1716. It







THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH, AND  
CHARLES 3<sup>rd</sup> EARL OF SUNDERLAND.

From a miniature at Blenheim



was said of her that she had her mother's beauty and her father's sweetness of disposition. Lady Sunderland made an extraordinary impression on her contemporaries, who declared that she was the soul of goodness. She seems to have been the only one of the daughters with whom the Duchess never quarrelled, and yet she had a good deal of her mother's spirit and could withstand her to her face; but she was so lovable, so tactful, and, without the least parade, so deeply religious and charitable, that even her imperious mother could see no fault in her. The ambition of the Duchess, in the last days of her ascendancy, had been to resign the gold key of Mistress of the Robes to her favourite daughter, and when Lady Sunderland died in the bloom of her life the Duchess was inconsolable. She begged Lord Sunderland to send her a lock of his wife's hair, and any little cup or trinket which her dear child had handled. It was a calamity to the Duchess that Lady Sunderland, who knew every turn of her mother's mind, and was beyond all else a peace-maker, did not live, not merely to be the consolation of her old age, but to hold her back from the freaks and foibles which marked it. This loss, following so closely on the death of Lady Bridgewater, fell heavily on the Duke, and all the more since he found himself unable to dispel the depression of the Duchess.

His first paralytic seizure quickly followed. He was struck down on the 28th of May, 1716. A part of that summer he spent at Tunbridge Wells, whither he had gone at the recommendation of Sir Samuel Garth. Steele, who was ever a warm friend of the Duke's, spent some days in August with him at that spa. The change proved beneficial, and as the autumn drew on his health greatly improved, but in November he had another seizure. Few men were more attached to the Duke than the poet and



physician, Sir Samuel Garth, who by this time was attached in the latter capacity to George I. Marlborough, in good report and evil, was always Garth's hero. He was the first man who was knighted by George I., and he begged the King on that occasion to borrow Marlborough's sword, a request that was graciously granted. His devotion to the Duke in his illness was of a kind that cannot be purchased. His letters still exist at Blenheim, and in one of them he says to the Duchess:

"I wish my Lord Duke's health depended on my wishes. I am almost inclined to think that everything is in your power, and I hope the greatest man upon earth will owe a long preservation to the care of the worthiest lady."<sup>1</sup>

In another he says:

"I am sorry you are not as successful in everything you undertake as the Duke of Marlborough. When you consider the reward of a great man—that did not only make the good of his countrymen his study in his lifetime, but also their preservation after his death—you will the less wonder that at least twenty towns and almost half as many victories are forgotten in as few hours almost as they were gained in. But truth is like light: it may be lessened, but can never be extinguished."<sup>2</sup>

The Duke made a surprising recovery from this second seizure, and he owed it to the devotion of the Duchess and the skill of Garth. A Court physician in those days, when the tedious journey to Blenheim had to be made by coach, could not be in constant attendance. Dr. Luther, the most famous Oxford physician of the period, was accordingly instructed by Garth to watch the patient. At that time medical men did not pay much attention to the question of diet, but this Oxford practitioner was an exception

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

to the rule. He wrote to the Duchess in the autumn of 1716 a letter, which merits citation:

" Dr. Luther is humbly of opinion that His Grace's case is by no means dangerous, and that His Grace has little else to do besides taking steel wine two or three times a day; to drink as much as he pleases of good French white wine, all red wines being apt to bind too much. But above all to go to bed about ten o'clock and to rise about eight or nine, and if possible to ride on horseback morning and afternoon; to dine at one o'clock, and if possible on one plain dish of easiest digestion, and not to eat much fruit whose juices are too cold for the stomach. The Duke must forbear all manner of meat at night, and ought rather to eat broth made of an old cock, bruised to pieces, bones and all, now and then two eggs poached in gravy, or five or six oysters just warmed in their shells."

He adds—what seems remarkable—that crabs and lobsters are "exceeding good," and gives the final caution, "sup about seven o'clock." The Duke was an admirable patient, and, unlike the Duchess, was never afflicted with "the spleen"; on the contrary, even in illness, his placid serenity never deserted him.

Unfortunately the Duke's recovery was retarded by the furious quarrel between the Duchess and Vanbrugh over Blenheim Palace. It almost seems as if the Duke's second seizure was occasioned by these angry recriminations, for the quarrel reached a climax on the 8th of November, just two days before this paralytic stroke. Vanbrugh wrote in a passion to the Duchess, protesting against her using him "so ill." "I never will trouble you more, unless the Duke of Marlborough recovers so far as to shelter me from such intolerable treatment."<sup>1</sup> The Duchess had sent to her lawyer a full statement of her grievances over the building, and he had asked explanations from the architect. Vanbrugh brushed the papers aside, and

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

told the Duchess that the charges she had made against him were "so full of far-fetched, laboured accusations, mistaken facts, and strained constructions, that I should put a very great affront upon your understanding if I supposed it possible you could mean anything in earnest by them but to put a stop to my troubling you any more." He went on to tell her brusquely that his only concern was for the Duke, "for whom I shall ever retain the greatest veneration." He goes on to state that the Duchess was like the Queen, who thought to get rid of a faithful servant, and predicted that the Tories would have the pleasure of seeing her entrust the work to someone who would make a bungle of the Duke's building, in much the same way as Harley "did of his victories, for which it was erected."

The Duchess stated that at the time of the Duke's first seizure, in 1716, Blenheim was only "an unfinished shell." The turrets were built at that time, the chapel was not in existence, the first courtyard between the main entrance to the palace and the clock-tower, with the surrounding buildings, was not even begun, and the bridge across the lake was still in process of construction. As to the interior of the house, the Duchess states that there was scarcely a room in such a condition as to put a bed up in it. She adds that visitors to Blenheim in 1716 said the place "was a chaos, which nobody but God Almighty could finish." It was left for her to bring order out of confusion, and the palace as it now stands is her monument.

The question of the arrears, incurred by the suspension of the works in the last years of the Queen, was met by an Act of Parliament, passed at the beginning of the reign of George I., which acknowledged the Crown's responsibility, and made the Treasury responsible for them; but Vanbrugh claimed that,

years before, when the Duke was abroad in the thick of his campaigns, Lord Godolphin, acting on His Grace's behalf, had authorized additional expenditure. This claim was long a bone of contention between himself and the Duchess, and the matter was finally thrown into Chancery. After prolonged litigation, it was decided, in 1723, that the Duke's estate was chargeable for a portion of the cost. Marlborough, apprehensive of such a result, had left the Duchess an additional £10,000 a year for a period of five years, apart from a jointure of £15,000 a year, that she might finish the building of Blenheim to her satisfaction. She was a splendid woman of business all her life, and she completed the palace at less than the stipulated sum of £50,000, and well within the allotted period. The cost of the building was £300,000, of which £240,000 was provided by the Civil List, whilst the remaining £60,000 was spent first and last by the Marlboroughs. The Duchess, when she grew restless at Antwerp in 1714, told the Duke that she would rather live in a cottage in England than in a palace abroad. But when she returned she fought, tooth and nail, over Blenheim, and Vanbrugh, who was as biting of speech as herself, told his friends that she ought to be hanged for her conduct.

The Duke's last public appearance of any moment was at the impeachment of Oxford in 1717. After 1718 his health slowly but steadily declined, and he was unable to take any further part in public affairs. He occasionally visited the country-house of one or other of his friends, and sometimes went to Bath, then at the height of its vogue as a fashionable resort, to drink the waters; but he lived chiefly—always with considerable state—in the completed wing of Blenheim, at Windsor Lodge, or at St. Albans. He had spent his best years in the saddle, and his old love of riding was his chief relaxation. When the

candles were lighted, he beguiled the long winter evenings with cards, and took a keen interest in the private theatricals got up for his amusement by his lively young granddaughters, who, since the deaths of Lady Sunderland and Lady Bridgewater, were living under the care of the Duchess. These plays were performed, as already mentioned, in the bow-window room, which lent itself admirably to the purpose. The whole household was admitted to share the entertainment. Young officers who had served in the Duke's last campaigns were the actors, whilst the actresses were Lady Anne Egerton, Lady Di Spencer, and their girl friends. The Duchess always read the plays carefully before the rehearsals began, and deleted any passages which she thought in the least degree risky. Dryden's "All for Love" was one of the plays performed.

Sir Richard Steele, who called Marlborough the hero of his heart, was present as a guest at Blenheim on that occasion, and he was asked to write a prologue for the play. He had a ready pen, but he appears to have hesitated, and Bishop Hoadly relieved him of the task. Steele accordingly took the more congenial part of stage-director, a work for which his position as Master of the King's Players at Drury Lane equipped him. Lady Bateman took the part of Cleopatra, whilst that of Anthony was personated by Captain Fishe, one of the Duke's old equerries. Anthony paid his addresses to Cleopatra with so much ardour that Steele, who was seated next to the Bishop, whispered: "I doubt Fishe is flesh, my lord." Next morning Hoadly and Sir Richard left the palace together. When they reached the Great Hall, they found it filled with two long rows of footmen in laced coats. Steele started back in embarrassment, and, turning to the prelate, inquired whether he was expected to give vails to all these

people. Hoadly shrugged his shoulders and replied that he supposed so. Whereupon the impecunious man of letters exclaimed that he feared he had not enough money to go all round. Then his mother-wit came to the rescue, and, with the hasty remark, "I have it," he stepped forward and propitiated the crowd of menials by addressing them as "Gentlemen." He told them that they had punctuated "All for Love" with such judicious applause last night that it was obvious that they were men of taste, and therefore, if they wished at any time to visit His Majesty's theatre, he would be happy to place seats at their disposal, and so left amid a round of applause without parting with a shilling.

As his illness increased, the Duke sometimes walked, with slow and failing steps, to his own portrait by Kneller, painted when he was in the fulness of his strength and renown. Once, after looking for a long time at the picture, he turned away with a sigh, exclaiming, "That was once a man!" The Duchess found time, in the midst of her devotion to him—it was never relaxed—to bandy repartees with Sir Samuel Garth, and to revile Dr. Mead, whom she apparently did not think was successful in his treatment of the patient. Society was going wild in Marlborough's last days over the South Sea Company, and the Duchess, who always believed in playing a bold hand, embarked in the speculation, and, with her usual astuteness, believing that the Bubble was expanding so fast that it must soon burst, had the good sense to take her profits, and came out before the crash, having added considerably to her fortune.

A ridiculous charge of sending money to the Pretender was trumped up against her in the Duke's last days. It was absolutely groundless, but it produced a coolness between herself and Lord Sunderland, which continued almost to his death, on the

19th of April, 1722. But the chief shadow on the Duke's closing days sprang from the recriminations, on other grounds, between the Duchess and her two surviving daughters, the Countess of Godolphin and the Duchess of Montagu. Nothing is more pathetic than the attempts which Marlborough made to persuade his daughters, when he was slowly dying, that they had the best of mothers, unless it be his desire to win Her Grace to a more conciliatory mood.

The end came at Windsor Lodge, when the forest was at its loveliest in all the glory of June. The Duke lay perfectly calm for several days, conscious that his last battle was approaching. The night before he died he listened to the prayers which were read to him, and, when the Duchess bent over him and asked whether he had heard them, answered: "Yes, and I joined in them." At daybreak the next morning, as the birds were carolling in the adjoining woods, John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, passed away without a struggle, on the 16th of June, 1722, in the seventy-second year of his age. When the tidings reached London, people said: "The Duke has found in Death his only conqueror." After lying in state at Marlborough House, he was buried, with military honours and stately pomp, in Westminster Abbey, and in the grave in Henry VII.'s Chapel where once had rested for a time all that was mortal of another illustrious soldier and compatriot, Oliver Cromwell. Blenheim received him in 1744, for the Duchess could not bear the thought that she should be separated in death from the man who had loved her with unswerving and ardent devotion.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DUCHESS AND HER DAUGHTERS

SARAH, DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH, was a young married woman of thirty-three when John Locke—who, by the way, died in the year that the Battle of Blenheim was fought—published his famous “Treatise on Education.” Locke’s counsels of perfection on the training of children probably never caught the eye of the Duchess, though she was always in her own fashion inclined to treat with more respect the words of philosophers than the advice of other serious writers, lay or cleric, at discretion. Anyhow, no trace can be found in her treatment of her young daughters that she had read a dissertation which, towards the end of the seventeenth century, made a great impression in the land, and helped to dispel the austerity which had existed for many generations in the relations of parent to child. The Duchess, even in the days when she was a young mother, was in outlook a survival of the old school which held stoutly to the view that children should be kept in their place, and ought never to be allowed, whatever might happen, to question authority. Manners were formal and ceremonious in the reigns of James II. and William and Mary, and children, especially if they happened to be of rank, were brought up in a hard and formal atmosphere, of which discipline, rather than sentiment, was the dominant note.

The Duchess, in the years when her daughters were most impressionable, was in strict attendance on the



Princess Anne, and though she ran to them with impulsive caresses if they were ill, she appears to have kept them at other times not, perhaps, at a distance, but at least in subjection. The spoilt child was exceedingly rare at that period; the neglected child was too common. Little people were treated like playthings to be taken up or set aside according to the caprice of the moment. They lived for the most part with tutors and governesses, and were too often only brought down from the nursery when their elders relaxed from their usual mood of indifference to one of complacent toleration; or when some honoured guest desired to "see the children," in order to coin a compliment to their mother on their good looks. Some women adore their sons, and appear to regard their daughters as youthful rivals in the affections of their husbands. The Duke of Marlborough was more indulgent than his wife, and to the last day of his life he kept the affection of his daughters.

The Duchess, with the best intentions in the world, missed her way to the heart of her pretty, vivacious girls. She lost her chance when they were in the schoolroom, and did so because she was too strict and censorious. When they came out, she was eager to advance their fortunes in the world, and was elated when the town extolled "Marlborough's Fair Daughters," and men of wit and fashion clinked their glasses to them as reigning toasts. Nothing is more tragic in life than the subtle growth of misunderstanding between a woman and her children, and when pride, high spirit, and unaccommodating temper rule on both sides, the issues are deplorable. No one could accuse the Duchess of Marlborough of being a cold woman. There are countless proofs that she had a warm heart, but the pity of it was that her children were made to feel that she had a warm temper as well, and as

most of them were liberally endowed in the same direction, revolt was inevitable. The Duchess, though not to her daughters—wounded pride in that direction blocked the way—softened in old age. On one occasion she was in the royal nursery when the Princess of Wales (afterwards Queen Caroline) was whipping her little son, who was crying piteously. The Duchess took the child's part, and ventured to protest against such stern chastisement. The Prince, who shortly afterwards became George II., was lolling in the room with an amused air. "Ah, see!" he exclaimed, "you English are none of you well bred, because you were not whipped when you were young." The Duchess confessed: "I thought to myself, 'I am sure you were not whipped when you were young,' but I choked it in." In her own nursery she seems to have spared the rod, but she probably dinned into the ears of her little girls the admonition "Children, obey your parents," with the result that as soon as might be they escaped with a light heart out of her control. "Marlborough's Fair Daughters" all married young, and no one can blame them.<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess outlived all her children but the Duchess of Montagu, with whom she was not on speaking terms in her lonely, disillusioned old age. How this rift in the family lute of the Churchills arose can be traced in letters, sometimes amusing, but more often pathetic, which still exist in the Blenheim archives. It was an untold misfortune to the Duchess when she lost in the lifetime of the Duke, in quick succession, the two daughters who best understood her: Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, and Anne, Countess of Sunderland. Lady Bridgewater was so light-hearted and kindly that Duchess Sarah, even in her most atrabilious moods, could not

<sup>1</sup> "Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," edited by Lord Wharncliffe. London, 1837; three vols.; vol. 1., pp. 76, 77.

pick a quarrel with her. The Countess of Sunderland possessed equal sweetness, but more courage, and could withstand her mother to her face; but the Duchess always recognized in her an unparaded saintliness to which she herself laid no claim. If these two had lived, her old age would not have been so embittered, for between them they represented sweetness and light—and, what is more, they both recognized without stint their mother's great qualities.

Harriet, Lady Godolphin, and Mary, Duchess of Montagu, were of altogether different temperament. Lady Godolphin was a vain, self-opinionated woman of lax principles, who led her own life with easy scruples. The Duchess of Montagu was a hard, brilliant, attractive woman of the world, and looked at her mother in a dry light, and was sarcastic of speech. She was, in her way, as oracular and self-willed as the Duchess, but was not endowed either with her brains or her fine qualities. Quite early in the lives of his children the misunderstanding between them and their mother can be traced in the Duke's letters. In the year in which Marlborough won his great victory at Ramillies, he wrote from The Hague to the Duchess, on the 4th of May, 1706, begging her to pass over "little faults," and to remember that his girls were "very young." He adds that they must be "barbarians if they do not make a kind return to so good a mother."<sup>1</sup>

Shortly afterwards the Duchess complained of the conduct of Lady Mary, and the reply the Duke wrote, on the 1st of July, 1706, was:

"I do grieve as much as any parent can when a child is unkind. We must hope the best, and be always careful not to resent their carriage to such a degree as to make the town judge as to who is in the right."<sup>2</sup>

In another letter in the same year the Duke ex-

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

presses pleasure that the Duchess is on "happy terms" with three of her children, and hopes to God that Lady Mary "will in time be truly sensible of the great obligations she has to you."

The Duchess, with what seems in these days amazing celerity, made, as has already been shown, great matches for her daughters. Lady Henrietta was married at eighteen; Lady Anne, whose bright eyes, according to Addison's fine compliment, were quite as deadly as her father's sword, was married at seventeen; Lady Elizabeth was a mere child of fifteen when she was wedded; and Lady Mary married the heir to a dukedom when she was only two years older. It must be admitted that none of them did otherwise than rejoice at their swift escape from their mother's thralldom.

Henrietta, Lady Rialton, became second Countess of Godolphin on the death of her father-in-law in 1712, and succeeded as Duchess of Marlborough, in her own right, on the death of her own father in 1722, though she did not inherit Blenheim, which was retained by the terms of the Duke's will to his wife for life. As she died before her mother, she was never mistress of the palace, and at her death, in 1733, Charles Spencer, fifth Earl of Sunderland, became second Duke of Marlborough, and from this grandson of the great soldier the present Duke is directly descended. The relations of the old Duchess and the new were always more or less strained. Henrietta was bewitched by Congreve the poet, and the old Duchess, who was a stickler on the question of morals, regarded with grave disapproval her daughter's infatuation for a handsome, wheedling fellow, who overflowed with compliments. Henrietta, it must be confessed, was not a model daughter. Letters which exist at Blenheim make it clear that she lacked tact and was not remarkable for filial devotion. In one of them

she protests to her mother that it is "most cruel" of her to think that she had no power with her. She adds that if the Duchess was not satisfied with her, that was an affliction which would soon wear off. In another letter Henrietta tells her mother that she is prepared to "go cheerfully to my martyrdom," which is scarcely a pleasing allusion to the fact that the Duchess had expressed a desire to see her. The interview in question appears to have been stormy, and so we find Henrietta writing after it had taken place: "It was impossible to love you and not take it ill that you should make me so many unkind reproaches." In one letter Henrietta begins with the cold and formal "Madam," and in another—for her mood changed as swiftly as that of her mother—with "My dear Angel Mamma." Just after the Duke's death, in 1722, Henrietta inadvertently opened a letter addressed to the Duchess of Marlborough, to find that it was intended for her mother. She promptly forwarded it under date the 19th of July, 1722, with this odd apology:

"MADAM,

"I am very sorry for the accident of this letter coming to me, because of giving your Grace the uneasiness of hearing from me, but indeed, I took it for myself, as indeed your Grace may be sure, and am, Madam,

"Your Grace's most obedient servant,

"MARLBOROUGH."<sup>1</sup>

It is small wonder that the wife of Marlborough resented such a letter from his daughter!

But in one of her letters Henrietta struck the nail on the head, for she told her "dear mamma," without mincing words, "that all would be well if she did but remember you were once of my age yourself."<sup>2</sup> It was

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

the old difficulty which the Duke in his lifetime had done his best to combat. The Duchess lacked imagination and sympathy in her relations with her children, and the one thing which she could not pardon was revolt from authority. On one occasion—the letter is dated the 12th of November, 1724—the old Duchess was provoked to write to her son-in-law, Francis, Lord Godolphin, in these terms about the conduct of her daughter:

“The ill-treatment which I have had from the Duchess of Marlborough both before and since her father’s death I believe there is no instance of to any mother since the world was made.”<sup>1</sup>

It was a characteristic outburst; but Godolphin, who was an easy, inert, good-natured man of the world, was as powerless to make peace as to bridge the Atlantic, and as long as both lived he had to wink at the blazing indiscretions of his wife and his mother-in-law.

Anne, Lady Sunderland, continually poured oil on the troubled waters; but she was sensitive, and occasionally the Duchess wounded the most dutiful of her daughters to the quick, not of set purpose, but because of her almost brutal plainness of speech. The Countess writes under date July, 1711:

“I take this opportunity, as being the least troublesome to my dear mamma, to assure you once more that I shall always design to do everything I think can show you I am grateful, out of reason, and out of love and duty, for you never had anybody loved you with more passion. I should be glad to lay my life down to give the least mark of it. I hope you will let me have the greatest happiness of this world—your good opinion. I am sure I shall live and die your most dutiful

“A. SUNDERLAND.”

<sup>1</sup> These and following citations are from the Blenheim Papers.

In a group of affectionate notes Lady Sunderland protests her love and devotion to her mother. Occasionally her remarks have a quaint flavour: "For, setting aside afflictions, I have had—which it is impossible to be without in this world—I have nothing to vex me but my house keeping." In another note she says: "The only misfortune I have had in the world is that I love my dear mamma most tenderly, and she does not think it." Lady Sunderland declared that she would rather go "through fire and water" than displease her mother. "If it were my last words I would say, whatever fault I have committed, it did not proceed from want of love to you." The Duchess had written complaining of the conduct of Lady Godolphin and Lady Monthermer, and this drew a protest from Lady Sunderland: "I am so sensible of my own misfortunes that I must say all that I can for my sisters, which is that I never saw what you think in either of them."

The Duchess expected her daughters to drop a courtesy whenever they came into her presence. Lady Monthermer, who was as impulsive as her mother, was guilty of neglect in this respect, and the Duchess wrote a railing letter to Lady Sunderland on the subject. The latter replied, meekly admitting that her sister was "mightily to blame," and declaring that she had not the "mildest temper" in the world; but hoped that she will be "penitent," and begged her mother in conclusion "once more to try to forgive." Lady Sunderland had the Duchess's confidence more than any other of her daughters. She always turned to her on the rare occasions when she felt the need of sympathy. If the Duchess caught a chill, she used to declare that her constitution was "broak," and with infinite tact Lady Sunderland would brush aside her fears. If her mother were kind, Lady Sunderland's gratitude was boundless; if she were angry, she

used to cry herself to sleep. She once told the Duchess significantly it was much easier to blame other people than to mend one's own faults. She seems to have had a fixed presentiment that her own life would be short, and hence we find her begging her mother to take under her roof her girls when she was gone. A year or two before her death Lady Sunderland, under date Althorp, the 9th of September, 1713, wrote a pathetic letter addressed to "My Lord (not to be given to him until after I am dead),"—

"I have always found it so tender a subject, my dear, to talk of my dying that I have chosen rather to leave my mind in writing which, though very insignificant, is some ease to me. Your dear self and the dear children are my only concern in this world. I hope in God you will find comfort in the loss of a wife, I am sure you lov'd too well not to want a great deal. I would be no further remember'd than what will contribute to your ease, which is to be careful, as I was, not to make your circumstances uneasy by living beyond what you have, which I could not, with all the care that was possible, quite prevent. When you have any addition, think of your poor children, and that you have not an estate to live on, without making some addition by saving. You will ever be miserable if you give way to the love of Play. As to the children, pray get my mother, the Duchess of Marlborough, to take care of the girls, and if I leave my boys too little to go to school—to be left to servants is very bad for children, and a man can't take the care of little children as a woman can—for the love that she has for me and the duty I have ever show'd her, I hope she will do it, and be ever kind to you, who was dearer to me than my life. Pray take care to see the children married with a prospect of happiness, for in that you will show your kindness to me, and never let them want education or money while they are young. My father has been so kind as to give my children fortunes, so that I hope they won't miss the opportunity of being settled in the world for want of Portions. But your own daughter may want your help, which I hope you



will think to give her, though it should straighten your income, or to any of mine if they want it. Pray let Mr. Flournoy's get some good-natur'd man for Lord Spencer's governor, who may be fit to go abroad with him. I beg of you to spare no expense to improve him, and to let him have an allowance to make him easy. You have had £5,000 of the money that you know was mine, which my mother gave me yearly. Whenever you can let him have the income of that for his allowance if he has none any other way, and don't be as careless of the dear children as when you relied upon me to take care of them. But let them be your care, though you should marry, for your wife may wrong them when you don't mind it. We must all die, but 'tis hard to part with one so much belov'd and in whom there was so much happiness, as you, my dearest, ever were to me. My last prayer shall be to the Lord Almighty to give you all blessing in this world, and grant that we may meet happy in the next. Pray give Lady Anne my diamond ear-rings. The middle drops are my mother's; and give Di my pearl necklace and watch, and give Lady Francis Spencer my diamond buckles, and give Mr. Flournoy's the medal of gold which you gave me when I was married, and the little picture which I have of you and Lord Spencer."<sup>1</sup>

Lady Sunderland recognized—apart from outbursts of temper—her mother's sterling qualities. She declared that, if she had twenty children, she would part with none of them except to the Duchess, for she knew perfectly well that her mother would look after her children. When Lord Sunderland found the letter which has just been cited, immediately after his wife's death, he sent it to the Duchess, who replied on the 13th of May, 1716:

"I send you enclosed that most precious letter which you sent me yesterday. You will easily believe it has made me drop a great many tears, and you

<sup>1</sup> From the original manuscript at Blenheim. It is also cited by Coxe, "*Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough*," vol. iii., p. 395.

may be very sure that to my life's end I shall observe religiously all that my poor dear child desired. I was pleased to find that my own inclinations had led me to resolve upon doing everything that she mentions, before I knew it was her request. . . . I desire when it is easy to you, that you will let me have some little trifle that my dear child used to 'weare in her pockitt,' and I desire Johnson (Lady Sunderland's maid) will look for some little cup she used to drink in. I have some of her hair, but Johnson may give me a better lock, at the full length."<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess was loyal to her trust, and was more indulgent to Lady Sunderland's children than she had ever been to her own daughters.

There is scarcely any allusion at Blenheim to her third daughter, Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, except a letter which reveals the inconsolable grief of her husband at her early death. Lady Bridgewater appears to have glided through life with the goodwill of everyone who knew her, and her death, when the Duke was still abroad, was the greatest blow he had received since his hopes had been extinguished by the death of Lord Blandford.

Mary, Duchess of Montagu, was the only child who outlived the Duchess. Pope described her as "the Angel Duchess," but he only knew her at a distance, and she had not an angelic temper. Marlborough once told his wife with a smile that he wondered Lady Mary and herself failed to agree, since they were so much alike. She did not possess her mother's great qualities—superlative common-sense, devotion to duty and moral courage; she only shared her weaknesses—disdain of contradiction, scorn of advice, and exasperating petulance. She was a beautiful woman to whom gallants bowed low, but the pity was that beneath her loveliness there lurked an imperious temper and a selfish heart. If she had

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," vol. iii., p. 397.

died and the Countess of Sunderland had lived, the Duchess of Marlborough might have grown old gracefully. The Duchess of Montagu might at least have treated her proud, lonely mother, beggared of hope and left with the burden of Blenheim on her shoulders, and the Duke's reputation to defend, with some show of consideration; and if she had done so, the Duchess was too warm-hearted a woman not to have responded to what she lacked pitifully in her old age—the sympathy of those who stood nearest to her.

The Duchess of Montagu went her own way, and flouted her mother, and the Duchess of Marlborough had too high a sense of her own dignity and her daughters' indebtedness to her to allow her to do so with impunity. It is not possible to enter at length into family wrangles, even if it were desirable, and the Duchess of Marlborough left among the Blenheim Papers a document of more than a hundred folio pages descriptive of the "barbarous treatment" which she had received from Lady Godolphin and the Duchess of Montagu. It is her own handwriting—a curious scrawl—just after the death of the Duke. In it she declares that the Duchess of Montagu "always had a great deal of harshness in her nature, and from a child would often snap me up, though I spoke to her with ever so much kindness"—a statement which may be accepted with a pinch of salt. It is quite clear that the Duchess thought Lady Mary the beauty of the family, and she admits that she had a great deal of wit, and it was only after great provocation that her own passion for her "burnt out." Then she describes the generous settlement which the Duke left her to draw up at the time of Lady Mary's marriage, and her own subsequent gift in money to her.

Lady Mary was devoted to her father, but in her letters to him said "very offensive things of me";<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

and when the Duke was dangerously ill in 1716, she and Lady Godolphin would never come to see him when he was alone, but only visited the house when company was there, and even "then they went towards him without taking any notice of me, as if they had a pleasure in showing everybody that they insulted me."<sup>1</sup> The Duchess states that when she met her daughter in the streets in her chair "she would not let down her glass and bow,"<sup>2</sup> and this behaviour made a disagreeable noise in the town. She tried to get her son-in-law Godolphin to make peace. But he was a prudent man, and declined to be raked by cross-fires. The Duchess's comment on his polite refusal is that "My Lord Godolphin knew too well Her Grace's temper."<sup>3</sup> He knew also that his mother-in-law's disposition was not too accommodating, and so, bowing low, declined the task of peacemaker.

The Duke in his last days did all that was possible to reconcile the Duchess and her daughter. He dictated a long letter to the Duchess of Montagu in 1721, in which he told her that her expressions of tenderness and duty towards himself would give him greater pleasure if she displayed more kindness towards her good mother. He declared that he knew how tenderly the Duchess loved her, and added that she had no reason for her complaints. He implored her to be reconciled to her mother, and assured her that she would be met with the greatest kindness, and added that, if she desired to make him happy "at a time of life when I most want it," she would show herself more considerate. Then the secretary adds: "What follows my Lord Duke writ with his own hand." It is written in a manner which shows that the Duke at that time could scarcely handle a pen, and is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"I am not well enough to write so long a letter in my own hand, and I believe I am the worse to see my children live so ill with a mother for whom I must have the greatest tenderness and regard."<sup>1</sup>

It was the last letter which the Duchess of Montagu received from her father, but it did not alter her attitude towards her mother. The Duke always declared that the Duchess had treated their children with great kindness, and he made it plain to the Duchess of Montagu, on more than one occasion, that she was not fulfilling her duty to himself unless she treated her mother with proper consideration.

After the Duke's death, the Duchess of Montagu led her own life, and saw nothing of her mother. In 1739, however, she seems to have made overtures of peace, but her mother was obdurate, and returned her letters unopened. Then she had recourse to stratagem. She wrote a letter to her mother, and took it to a lawyer in the Temple and asked him to address it. Her mother, who was accustomed to receive many lawyer's letters, opened it eagerly, under the impression that it had something to do with business. Her daughter had long ceased to address her as "My dearest Mama," and what the old Duchess read was as follows:

"MADAM,

"I hope you will forgive this first and last deceit I ever was or will be guilty of towards you, and have the goodness to consider that I must suffer when the moment I entertain'd the agreeable belief that it was possible for me to prove that in some things I have been wronged to you. I was denied pleading my cause to the only judge, except my own conscience, by whom I wish to be acquitted."<sup>2</sup>

It appears that a mutual friend, a certain Mrs. Hammond, was endeavouring at that time to bring

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

about a reconciliation. The Duchess wrote under date the 17th of November, 1739, a letter to that lady from Marlborough House, in which she states that—

“After all that has pass’d in so many years I never will have anything more to do with her, and what I write now is only to you who are very agreeable to me notwithstanding your partiality of endeavouring to excuse things which are inexcusable.”

She alludes scornfully to her daughter as the “great lady.” She proceeds to give a long account of all that she had done for the Duchess of Montagu, and adds that—

“She was from a girl very ill-tempered, but I lov’d her; and if I had not I would have hid it from the world in order to dispose of her well. I married her to the chief match of England in all respects, and the settlements which I made for her were uncommon.”

She adds that the Duke left such matters entirely in her hands, and states that—

“If it had not been for my favour she must have been married to some country gentleman with £1,500 or £2,000 a year, which for ought I know might have been better both for her and for me—at least ’tis probable it would have made her behave better.”

The Duchess ends by stating that in the Duke’s lifetime she was anxious to be reconciled to her daughter, and then ends:

“But now I have taken my resolution unalterable that I never will have anything more to say to her. My life is very near run out, and I am sure she can now never give me any more pain or pleasure, and therefore I desire that you would never name her more to your most faithful, humble servant,

“S. MARLBOROUGH.”<sup>1</sup>

Long before this she had told the Duchess of Montagu that she really thought it was best that

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

they should continue as they were, "without making any new comedies for the world, which was tattling all too freely about their strained relations."<sup>1</sup> Hence it came about that, in the autumn of 1739, the curtain fell on what in reality was a tragedy rather than a comedy.

It often happens that old people are more indulgent to their grandchildren than to their own children. They stand on a different footing, and are neither so apt to challenge authority or fail in deference, even to the freaks and foibles of those from whom they have great expectations. The grandchildren of the Duchess, with perhaps one or two exceptions, retained her good graces and kept on good-humoured terms with her, and she, on her part, was considerate—in spite of summer hurricanes—towards them. One of them, Lady Anne Egerton, married, in 1725, the third Duke of Bedford. Another, Lady Isabella Montagu, was a favourite with the Duchess even when the latter was not on speaking terms with Lady Isabella's mother. Lady Isabella married, in 1723, William, second Duke of Manchester. The young Duchess of Manchester, for reasons which her grandmother states she could never understand, was coldly treated by both her parents, with the result that she made an early and loveless marriage. She was witty, "extremely agreeable," but sharp-tempered. For twelve or fifteen years before her marriage she was constantly with the Duchess of Marlborough, who says:

"I pitied her, and for all that time acted the part of a kind grandmother, which most people know. I loved her as much as if she had been my own child, and never pretended to use any authority over her, but conversed with her as if we had been sisters."<sup>2</sup>

The two daughters of Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, Lady Henrietta and Lady Mary Godolphin,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

married respectively the Duke of Newcastle and the Duke of Leeds. Oddly enough, it was Vanbrugh, at a time when his quarrel with the Duchess had not ripened, who negotiated the settlement of Lady Mary with the Duke of Leeds.

But the favourite grandchildren of the Duchess were unquestionably the children of Anne, Lady Sunderland. She was passionately devoted to two of them: Jack Spencer, who married Lady Georgiana Carteret, and to whom she bequeathed her old home, Holywell, at St. Albans, as well as Marlborough House, for life, after which it was to revert to the holder of the Marlborough title. His sister, Lady Di, married the fourth Duke of Bedford. He was always on agreeable terms with the Duchess of Marlborough. Before his marriage to Lady Di, he good-naturedly helped the Duchess with her voluminous correspondence, and won her heart by respectful attentions. She called him, with a touch of characteristic humour, the "best servant and minister that ever I had," and added: "I think Providence designs to make me amends for some of my past sufferings by the goodness and kindness of this young man." And Mary Wortley Montagu states that Jack Spencer, in the eyes of the Duchess, in spite of his wild frolics, "could do nothing wrong." He died in 1732, or the loneliness of the last twelve years of the Duchess's life would not have been so absolute. Lady Di, before her marriage, was the constant companion of the Duchess, and acted as her secretary. She was a beautiful, vivacious girl, who was devoted to her grandmother, and contrived to keep on affectionate terms with her without any sacrifice of independence.

Lady Di was so bewitching as to make a conquest of hearts without knowing it. It is not commonly known that she might have married Philip, Earl of



Chesterfield, the most brilliant and accomplished man of quality of his times. This statement rests on the Blenheim Papers, which contain both Chesterfield's proposal for her hand and Lady Di's graceful refusal of the honour. Lord Chesterfield, of course, made his proposal in a letter to the Duchess:

“THE HAGUE.

“MADAM,

“The honour I once had of Your Grace's favour and protection of which I have always retain'd a just sense encourages me to address myself to Your Grace in this manner; my absence allows me no other way of doing it and the subject is of so great consequence to myself that I hope it will in some degree justify the liberty I take. The person, the meritt and the family of Lady Diana Spencer are objects so valuable, that they must necessarily have already caused many applications of this nature to Your Grace, as they oblige me to add to the number of them, and though they may be all so much better founded than mine as to leave me very little hopes of success, yett I could never forgive myself if I omitted even the least possibility of being so happy. Your Grace will therefore permitt me to throw myself at Lady Diana's feet, and with the utmost respect to offer her the absolute disposall of myself and fortune. I am sensible how unworthy they are of her and how small a chance I have of their being accepted since I can only hope for it from an error in both your Grace's judgement and hers. I will not presume now to trouble Your Grace with any particulars till I first know whether I have your premission to do it. If I obtain that, the short stay I shall make here will soon allow me to do it in person in England. I cannot conclude this letter without assuring Your Grace, that the honour I should have of being so nearly related to you is not one of my least temptations, and that I should be proud of adding the tyes of duty to those of veneration and respect with which I have the honour now to be, Madam,

“Your Grace's most humble and  
obedient servant,

“[CHESTERFIELD.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers

He was too much of a laggard in love. Lady Di's reply—the copy of it at Blenheim is undated—shows clearly beneath its shy phrases that he might have won her hand if he had pressed his suit earlier :

“ MY LORD,

“ I am sure nothing could have contributed so much to my happiness as such an alliance with your Lordship. But before I receiv'd your letter, I was too far engaged in a treaty to break it off, and I can now only wish that your Lordship will be so good as to let me see you sometimes, though I cannot have the honour which you destin'd me, who am and shall allways be with the greatest respect imaginable your Lordship's most faithfull and most oblig'd humble servant,

“ DI SPENCER.”<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess was flattered, and never forgot Lord Chesterfield's proposed alliance with her favourite granddaughter. This is shown by her will, in which she bequeathed to Philip, Earl of Chesterfield, “ out of the great regard which I have for his merit, and the infinite obligations I have received from him, my best and largest brilliant diamond ring and £20,000.” Even this did not exhaust her recognition of Lord Chesterfield, who in truth was always one of her most trusted friends. She left him property in Northampton and Surrey, and the reversion of her Wimbledon estate.

At one time the Duchess, who deemed that all things were possible to Lady Di, aspired to marry her to Frederick, Prince of Wales. The Prince was at daggers drawn with George II., and the Duchess cherished a mortal antipathy for Queen Caroline. The royal scapegrace was heavily dipped in debt, and, as the Duchess detested the Court as much as he did, he requested the honour of a call, and she offered him the hand of Lady Di and with it £100,000 as her

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

portion. The Prince—there was no Royal Marriage Act in those days—would not have been human if he had declined such an overture. The marriage was secretly arranged to take place at Windsor, but Walpole caught wind of it, and was just in time to prevent it taking place.

Lady Di's death at the early age of twenty-eight was the last great sorrow of the Duchess. With her death the last gleam of sunshine faded from the sky of the Duchess of Marlborough's now lonely life. Lady Di's sister, Lady Anne, did not share her happy temperament, with the result that she was often in disgrace at Blenheim. It was on one such occasion that the Duchess, enraged by some act of defiance, blackened her granddaughter's portrait at Blenheim, and wrote underneath the disfigured picture the bitter words, "She is more black within." Lady Anne married William, Viscount Bateman, an Irish peer.

In the natural course of events, William, Marquis of Blandford, only son of Duchess Henrietta, would have succeeded to the dukedom. Whilst making the grand tour, Lord Blandford fell in love with the daughter of a rich burgomaster at Utrecht, whose sister was married to William, fifth Earl of Denbigh. He wrote to the Duchess to tell her that he intended to marry this lady, and she replied in hot haste, protesting against a match which disappointed all her hopes.<sup>1</sup> Lord Blandford, who was well aware that such a union would be a chagrin to his ambitious grandmother, wedded the lady before the Duchess's protest could reach him. The Duchess, with characteristic impetuosity, wrote a second letter—though the first had been full of "ingenious curses"—filled with benedictions, and adding that she was impatient to embrace Lady Blandford, who, it may be stated in passing, did not long survive her husband. His death

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

occurred at Oxford in August, 1731, two years after his marriage. He went thither to attend a great Tory meeting, and remained overnight as the guest of Balliol. He drank not wisely but too well at table—so much so, indeed, that Dr. Leigh ventured to counsel prudence. Next day he was seized with a high fever, and the following night his host sat up with him reading prayers, for, in spite of his habits, Lord Blandford had a deep sense of religion. Early next morning he fell into a state of collapse and died. The Duchess was sent for post-haste, but no tidings were given her of the blow which awaited her. She arrived at Balliol about ten o'clock with Lady Di Spencer. All that she had been told was that Lord Blandford was ill. Dr. Leigh met her and ushered her into the house. "How is poor Blandford?" was her first question. Dr. Leigh bowed and said nothing. "Ay, I suppose he's dead. I would have given half my estate to have saved him. I hope the Devil is picking that man's bones who taught him to drink." Halfway up the stairs the Duchess suddenly turned and shook her stick at Lady Di, who was following. "Where is my basket, Di? Did I not charge you to bring it?" Lady Di instantly ran back to the coach and brought a heavy hand-basket, which, it was supposed, contained money. The Duchess stayed two hours at Balliol, discussing the case in technical terms with the physicians, who had been summoned hastily to meet her. Then the young widowed Marchioness, who had also been summoned, was announced. The Duchess overwhelmed her with sympathy, though she never saw her again. As she went down the stairs, she turned to Mrs. Leigh and said, "I shall take another opportunity of satisfying the woman of the house," and was quickly on the road back to Blenheim. This story is told by the late Lady Leigh in "*Memorials of Old Warwickshire*." It was when in the

company of one of her husband's ancestors, Mr. Leigh of Stoneleigh Park, that Lord Blandford had met his bride at Utrecht.

Duchess Henrietta died two years later, and the title passed, in 1733, to his cousin Charles, fifth Earl of Sunderland, who then became second Duke of Marlborough. His succession was due to the death, in 1729, of his elder brother, Robert, fourth Earl of Sunderland. Robert, fourth Earl, was always on excellent terms with his grandmother, and she looked forward with pride to his succession to the dukedom. She had watched over his education, as indeed she did over that of all her grandsons; the letters which exist at Blenheim, written by their tutors to the Duchess, are themselves a tribute to the unrelaxing care she took in this direction. The Duchess was in her seventieth year when this favourite grandson was struck down by illness in Paris. She at once proposed to hasten thither in order to nurse him, but his death took place before she could carry out her purpose. She always declared that he had been badly treated, and was never tired of blaming what she called the "murdering physicians," who appear, if the truth must be told, to have had recourse to desperate remedies. Charles, fifth Earl of Sunderland, who now became heir to the dukedom, was a young man of extravagant habits. He was always a thorn in his grandmother's side, especially as he plunged into debt, which was a weakness she could never condone.

After the death of his brother Robert, the Duchess, in one of her relenting moods, gave the young Earl of Sunderland the historic diamond sword which had been presented to his grandfather by the Emperor Charles of Austria. When she heard, however, that the young Earl was in the toils of the money-lenders, she brought an action at law to shield him from the

possible temptation of parting with so great an heirloom. The indomitable lady appeared in court to support her plea, and made characteristic appeal, which was successful: "That sword my lord would have carried to the gates of Paris. Am I to live to see the diamonds picked off one by one and lodged at the pawnbroker's?" No such indignity happened. The sword which the Emperor presented to the first Duke is still the proud possession of his descendants. But the actual sword which he wore in battle was bequeathed by him to his ever loyal comrade in arms, Eugene, Prince of Savoy, who on receiving it unsheathed the glittering blade, and exclaimed: "Voilà l'épée que j'ai suivie par toute cette longue guerre."

Charles, second Duke of Marlborough, had the martial spirit of his race. He was a soldier who fought gallantly at the Battle of Dettingen in 1743, and, after other military services, died suddenly at Münster in Westphalia whilst still on active service, in 1758. He married Miss Trevor, daughter of Lord Trevor of Bromham, greatly to the displeasure of the Duchess, who could not forget that her father had been an opponent of the Duke. His brother, Jack Spencer, was twice returned to Parliament as Member for Woodstock. He was almost as extravagant as Charles, but like his sister, Lady Di, he knew how to humour the Duchess. Sometimes she would order him out of the room, and a few minutes later he would make her laugh by vaulting gracefully through the window into her presence. The Duchess in her old age was accustomed to give a dinner-party every year to all her young relatives at Marlborough House. "What a glorious sight it is," she exclaimed when a family gathering was assembled round the table, "to see such a number of branches flourishing from the same root!" "Alas!" said Jack Spencer, in low

tones which his grandmother could not catch, "the branches would flourish far better if the root were underground." Autocrats make so insistent a demand on obedience that even when they are prodigal in gifts they seldom win that spontaneous homage which to them is the requital they most desire. In other words, apart from more lofty considerations, it seldom answers, as the Duchess found, to be too exacting. Madame de Staël was right: "It does not do to war with the world. The world is too strong for the individual." It would have been well for the Duchess of Marlborough if she had recognized such a fact.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### SARAH IN OLD AGE

THE Duchess to the close of her life took a keen, though rather cynical, interest in politics. Abigail, Lady Masham, though a good deal younger, died ten years before her. Lady Masham ceased to count either in politics or society when Anne's reign ended in 1714, and her closing days were spent in well-endowed obscurity. The other mortal antipathy of the Duchess, Robert Harley, first Earl of Oxford, had died much earlier, in political disgrace; indeed, he only outlived the Duke of Marlborough a couple of years, and had no footing at the Court of George I., because of his intrigues with the Pretender. The Duchess would scarcely have been happy without implacable resentments, and in this respect Queen Caroline, consort of George II., and Sir Robert Walpole, first Earl of Orford, took the place in her black books left vacant by Lady Masham and Harley. Her hatred of Walpole—it might almost be described as a mania—darkened her last days, for she thought that he was hurling England to perdition. Her resentment against Queen Caroline chiefly arose from the fact that she gave an unswerving support to that statesman.

Apart from politics, the Duchess had an inordinate desire to possess landed estate. She believed that Walpole's financial policy spelt ruin to the funds, and, as the land could not run away, she buried her money in it. She died possessed of thirty estates,



and it is significant that the first of them was purchased the year after the Duke's death, and the last in the last year of her own life. One of them was the Manor of Wimbledon, which she bought from Sir Theodore Jansen, of the South Sea Company, when the crash came which ruined his fortunes. She pulled down the house and built another, and when it was finished she was not pleased with its aspect. Down it came in turn, and up went another mansion with a more sunny outlook. She lived there a good deal for a few years, and then grew tired of the place, residing chiefly, as years went on, either at Marlborough House or Windsor Lodge. But, to her credit, she built houses for other people as well as herself, for towards the very poor she was always generous. The almshouses at St. Albans, which the Duchess both built and endowed in 1736, are an enduring memorial of her generosity. There are thirty-six of them, and they form three sides of a quadrangle. Each recipient of the charity must be over sixty years of age, and they all receive an allowance of three shillings a week and medical attendance, and are in every case placed in possession of four rooms with an ample garden. In the quadrangle there still stands a noble cedar-tree, which the Duchess herself planted.

Her friendships were not many, but they were ardent, and the letters at Blenheim, which have never been published, show that she did good by stealth. Lady Lechmere, wife of an eminent barrister, who became Solicitor-General in 1718, and was raised to the peerage in 1721, was her bosom friend. Another lady whom she greatly liked was Miss Cairnes, who on her marriage became Lady Blayney. Mrs. Burnet, third wife of the Bishop of Salisbury, who went on a secret mission in the Whig interest to the Court of Hanover in 1707, was always deep in the confidence of the Duchess; and so, for a number of years, was

Mrs. Clayton, afterwards Lady Sundon, though the Duchess looked somewhat askance at her when, as Bedchamber Woman to Queen Caroline, she practically controlled the patronage of the Court. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whom Fielding called "the glory of her own sex and the wonder of ours," took the Duchess by storm in her old age—and with small wonder, for they were both quick-witted, impulsive, unconventional women. It was to Lady Mary that she told the pathetic story of a stormy scene with the Duke, which ended with her cutting off her glorious locks, which he had always admired, and dashing out of the room. When her rage had spent its force she returned, in order that the servants might not discover her folly; but the tresses were not lying on the floor where she had left them, and she feared that they might have been removed by her maid. Years afterwards, when the Duke was dead, she unlocked a cabinet in which he kept his most treasured possessions, and there, carefully folded away, was the hair she had left at his feet. At that point of the story the Duchess broke into uncontrollable grief.

But the woman who knew the mind of the Duchess best, when the long day of her extraordinary life was drawing to its gloomy sunset, was one of her own dependents—Grace Ridley, the daughter of a clergyman near Woodstock. She served the Duchess with infinite tact and unwearied devotion. The confidence which the Duchess placed in this faithful woman was shown by the words which she wrote on the packet which contained the Duke's love-letters. She stated that she had twice tried to burn them, but her resolution had failed, and therefore she requested Grace Ridley to commit them to the flames when she was gone. There is no proof that the latter ever saw these instructions, for the papers of the Duchess were

voluminous, and passed at once into the hands of the executors, and so the packet escaped destruction. The Duchess by her will bequeathed £15,000 to Grace Ridley, together with an annuity of £300. She also gave her two pictures of the Duke and a portrait of herself by Sir Godfrey Kneller, and the "striking watch" which had originally belonged to her husband, and which she herself wore.

The intimacy with Mrs. Burnet began in the reign of William III., at the time when the King appointed Marlborough Governor to the young Duke of Gloucester, and entrusted the direction of the Prince's studies to the Bishop. Mrs. Burnet was a deeply religious woman, inclined to mysticism, and if that had been her only recommendation the Duchess would in all probability have fought shy of her. But she was also a keen politician, and had great influence at Court, which she used to advance the fortunes of Lord Sunderland. She was an ardent Whig, and it seems clear that she did a great deal to enlist the sympathies of the Duchess with that party, a circumstance which proved embarrassing to the Duke and Godolphin at a time when they both wished to stand uncommitted. Mrs. Burnet has, in short, to be taken into account in any attempt to estimate the influences which turned the Duchess of Marlborough into a violent partisan of the Whigs. Almost the first letter she wrote after the Battle of Blenheim was one with tidings of the victory addressed to her friend at Salisbury, and it was for Bishop Burnet that she penned the characteristic document, a copy of which is still at Blenheim, entitled "What first struck me" in regard to the growing coolness of Queen Anne.

There exists at Blenheim a document, written by the Bishop's wife, on which the Duchess has inscribed: "A character writt by Mrs. Burnet of Mrs. Freeman." It is too long to cite in its entirety, but two or three

sentences in it are significant. Mrs. Burnet says, speaking of the Duchess, that her

"understanding was clear and penetrating, her imagination lively, and her judgment so exact that I ever hardly observed her fail in the giving the characters of those who came within her observation, or make a wrong judgment of any matter that was laid before her. Some malicious or ignorant persons have accused her, as they generally do all favourites, of insincerity, but never any with less truth. She was sincere, because she could not be otherwise. She could neither flatter her best friends, nor use any artifice to secure herself against her severest enemies."

There is an interesting allusion about the early attachment between Sarah Jennings and John Churchill:

"nor was it any blind or unreasonable passion that inclined her to prefer the Duke of Marlborough to all others, though his fortune then was in its infancy, but the effect of judgment at an age when few exercise that faculty. She then saw that good understanding and those excellent qualities that have since made him the wonder of the world—his success being the cause of the one, as his great genius was the cause of the other. If ever any lady had a just claim to great genius it is the Duchess of Marlborough, for she had little, if any, advantage from education, being put in the Court a child [and] married very young."

The "Character" ends by extolling the Duchess's "blameless morals," and by defending her from the charge of being "cold and careless in matters of religion," which Mrs. Burnet thought was due to her aversion to hypocrisy.

There are many of Lady Lechmere's letters at Blenheim, and they show that she was on confidential terms with the Duchess—so much so, indeed, that in one of them she asks for a loan of a thousand pounds. She had played high at Bath, and dared not tell her lord of her loss at the tables. In another she begs

the Duchess to read the philosophic writings of John Locke. She entertains her with an amusing account of a review of the troops in 1722: " 'Tis melancholy to see the officers of the Foot such boys—they look much fitter for dancing minuets than fighting." Lady Lechmere quotes Dr. Garth as telling her that, "though the Duchess of Marlborough had many enemies, all of them were people who did not know her."<sup>1</sup> She amuses the Duchess on another occasion with a diverting letter, written in the autumn of 1724, about the freaks and foibles of the fashionable crowd at Bath. Steele's play "The Conscious Lovers" she treats with scorn, calling it "low nonsense," and expressing her wonder that the theatre should be crowded for eighteen nights in succession.

"My Lady Mary Wortley said she had gone four times, and it was like so many doses of physic. She declared that the reason why she had submitted was obedience to Mr. Wortley, whose friend Sir Richard was."

Lady Lechmere adds:

"If the author's circumstances did not demonstrate the contrary, one would believe that, instead of being paid himself, he had paid others for seeing his play, for I know no other rational account to be given for anybody's sitting patient at such a performance."

The Duchess wrote complaining of sleepless nights, and consulting Lady Lechmere about the completion of the palace. In reply, the latter wrote telling Her Grace not to catch cold in going out so much to see what the workmen were about, and adding:

"I am glad you think of putting up inscriptions at Blenheim, for 'tis not only a proper ornament for such a place, but a useful History to Posterity. I believe you could engrave some mighty sentences,

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

but the times are dangerous, and 'tis not worth going to the Tower for it, or else one might—cut deep. Large as Blenheim is, there may be, with justice, so much said of the Duke of Marlborough that the walls might be filled without flattery. The fine spirits are all in the dust, and none succeed them.”<sup>1</sup>

Amongst other ladies whom the Duchess held in regard were the Duchess of Devonshire, the Countess of Burlington, and her own niece, Lady Dillon. The men who had most influence with her after the deaths of Sidney, Earl of Godolphin, and Arthur Maynwaring, were Philip, Earl of Chesterfield, and Charles, first Duke of Manchester, who, when he was Ambassador at Venice in 1708, was commissioned by the Duchess to purchase at Genoa no less than 3,500 yards of damask and velvet in yellow, blue, scarlet, green, and crimson, for the adornment of the palace. The Duke of Manchester's son afterwards married Lady Anne Spencer, granddaughter of the Duchess.

Shortly after she became a widow, Duchess Sarah's hand was sought in marriage by the Duke of Somerset, but the proffered honour was waved aside by the declaration that if he were the Emperor of the World she could not allow him to “succeed in that heart which had been devoted to John, Duke of Marlborough.” She always remained, however, on terms of cordial friendship with the Duke of Somerset, and even, it is said, suggested to him the lady whom he might make his bride. She placed great reliance in old age on the judgment of Hugh, Earl of Marchmont, to whom she bequeathed two landed estates in Buckinghamshire. The Duchess prided herself on her medical knowledge, and treated cavalierly most of the physicians, even men as eminent as Radcliffe and Mead and Sir Henry Sloane, who were called on various occasions into consultation. The only one of them

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

who was really able to hold his own with her was Sir Samuel Garth, who, professional skill apart, had a keen sense of humour and knew how to amuse her. It is recorded that Garth, when the Duke's illness was critical, wanted him to take a draught against which he rebelled. The Duchess joined her persuasions to those of the physician, exclaiming, so it is said: "I'll be hanged if it does not do you any good." "Take it, your Grace," said Garth, "for in any case it will do you good." The Duchess laughed, and the Duke surrendered.

She, though not as a rule partial to the clergy, was at least on cordial terms with four of them—Bishop Burnet, Bishop Hoadly, Dr. Samuel Clarke, and Dr. Francis Hare. Burnet was quite as much a politician as a prelate, and the Duchess admired him for the stand which he made against Dr. Sacheverell. Hoadly was what would now be described as a Broad Churchman, and that, with the circumstance that he was a polished courtier, attracted the Duchess, who was always glad to welcome him to Blenheim. Bishop Hoadly flattered his hostess with compliments. In one letter he exclaims: "Nothing can equal my Lady Marlborough at Court but my Lady Marlborough in the country."<sup>1</sup> It was in this manner that Hoadly announced, on the 14th of September, 1721, his translation from the See of Bangor to that of Hereford:

"If Your Grace (then at Blenheim) on your return to London stays at all at Windsor I hope to give myself the pleasure of waiting upon you there. Another reason is that I have a fancy Your Grace will not believe the piece of news relating to myself, unless you have it under my own hand. Nor would I venture to tell it you myself till the ceremony of kissing the King's hand for it is over. And I have one very peculiar pleasure in writing to Your Grace

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

at Blenheim, that I am to be Bishop of Hereford, because it puts me in mind that Blenheim lies so little out of the road to that city, that it can hardly be avoided in my passage to it or from it, as long as I have so much inclination to pay homage there, and as long as the Lord and Lady of the Castle don't deny the entrance."<sup>1</sup>

A year later, when the Duke died, Bishop Hoadly indicted a letter of condolence which might have been written by one pagan to another. Although Hoadly always protested that he had received more kindness from her than all his other friends put together, when she grew old and could no longer do anything to obtain for him further preferment, he forgot, to borrow his own phrase, to pay homage; otherwise this bitter endorsement would not have been written on a packet of his letters by Her Grace:

"This man I made a Bishop by my perpetual solicitation after King George came into England. I gave him money when he was in distress, and lived with him many years as a true friend. But when times changed, and he did not want me, he left off visiting me, tho' I never had the least quarrel with him. But when I was out of fashion with the present King and Queen (George II. and Caroline) he never took any notice of me."<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Samuel Clarke was Chaplain to Queen Anne, and in that way was brought into close association with the Duchess. He was a man of more lofty qualities than Hoadly, a keen controversialist, a sound classical scholar, and a philosopher of so high a reputation that he was offered the post of Master of the Mint on the death of Sir Isaac Newton, an appointment which he declined because he thought it was incompatible with his work as a clergyman. His letters to the Duchess, which are still at Blenheim, show that he was proficient in the art of courtly though never subservient correspondence.

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



But it was Dr. Francis Hare who, amongst the clergy, had most influence with the Duchess; and if he had outlived her it seems probable she would have entrusted to him the task on which she had set her heart in her last days—an authoritative biography of the Duke, with full appeal to the State, Military, and Family Papers at Blenheim. Dr. Hare, who in later life was in turn Dean of St. Paul's, Bishop of St. Asaph, and finally Bishop of Chichester, was a personal friend of the Duke, and did his best to vindicate him by a volume in reply to Swift's "Conduct of the Allies" in 1711, the first edition of which, even in those days, was exhausted in five hours. Dr. Hare was almost the only man, whether cleric or lay, who ventured to point out her faults to the Duchess. He took the privilege of an old friend in her closing years, and she had the good sense not to resent his candour.

In a letter dated the 26th of August, 1726, he writes to her with a fine union of courtliness and courage:

" 'Tis the fate of great persons to be generally entirely ignorant of the sentiments their friends have of their conduct with regard to anything that is amiss in it, and therefore 'tis possible nobody may have never taken the liberty I now do. I hope and believe, Madame, I need not tell Your Grace that I have the most affectionate esteem for you. I not only esteem, but really admire you for your fine understanding and good sense, and for the just and noble sentiments which you express on all occasions in the best language and in the most agreeable manner. But the more I esteem and admire what is excellent in Your Grace, the more concerned I am to see any blemishes in so great a character. Ill-grounded suspicions and a boundless liberty of expressing resentments of persons without distinction, from the Prince downwards, in the most public manner and before servants, are certainly blemishes, and not only so but are attended with great inconveniences.

They limit exceedingly the influence, persons of Your Grace's fortunes and endowments would otherwise have, and unavoidably create enemies. It is, I think, confessedly one of the most prudent truths of life for persons in all stations not to give needless and unnecessary offence, since no person is so great as not to want, on many occasions for themselves, relations or friends, the favour and good-will of others. Least of all is it desirable to incur the settled displeasure or ill-will of a Prince, since he seldom can want long for an opportunity of making it felt in some degree or other."<sup>1</sup>

It would have been better for the Duchess if other people who were entitled to speak freely to her had expressed with the same manliness and tact their real opinions of her own unguarded and often reckless speech. She had so much courage of her own that she appreciated it in others, but the pity was her humour was so sardonic and her tongue so caustic that Dr. Hare's example was very seldom followed. The majority of those around her habitually used the language of compliment, and often that of adulation, little dreaming that when they departed she placed most of them in one or other of her favourite categories—fools or knaves. When she met with people who were simple, natural, quietly independent, and, as she deemed, honestly outspoken, her mood relaxed, she forgot to rail, and became, in a genial sense, confidential. The pity is that it was but seldom she met men or women who knew how to strike the right note in social intercourse with her. There was no question that she was considerate, and even kind, to her dependents, so long as they did their duty and treated her with the respect due to her years and rank. Sickness or calamity never failed to evoke her practical sympathy, and if she thought that any of her servants had been wronged by others who

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

stood above them, her sense of justice came instantly into play. It was not customary in the eighteenth century to leave bequests to footmen and maids, but the Duchess, by the terms of her will, did not forget the most lowly of her dependents.

Another cleric who was a frequent guest at Blenheim in the last days of the Duke was Dr. Barzillai Jones, Fellow of All Souls and Dean of Lismore, who, as a Non-juror, had been deprived of the latter preferment. He married a distant kinswoman of the Duke of Beaufort, and this, together with the patronage of the Duke of Ormonde, paved the way for his advancement. He was a jovial, boisterous, easy-going man of the world, short of stature, ruddy of countenance, and rotund in person. It is conjectured that he met the Duke of Marlborough at Bath, and, as he told a story uncommonly well, possessed easy manners, and played skilfully at cards, the Duke took a fancy to him, and all the more since his career had been broken at the Revolution. The Duke appointed him domestic chaplain at Blenheim, somewhat to the chagrin of the Duchess, who only tolerated him because he helped to beguile the tedium of her lord. When La Guerre was decorating the grand salon, he gratified the ubiquitous chaplain by painting his portrait on the walls, and there it remains to this day. A suite of rooms on the ground-floor of the palace also had painted in gilt letters on the oak door "Dean Jones' Rooms," and they have always been used by succeeding chaplains. Although the Duke liked the man, other people did not share his opinion. He seems to have been a fussy, inquisitive, domineering person, and he might have been the original of the parson with uplifted hands in one of the famous pictures in which Hogarth delineated *Marriage à la Mode*. The Duchess always thought him a "great hypocrite," and declared that

"he had so many disagreeable qualities that I did not like him."<sup>1</sup> She adds that Dean Jones had a good deal of wit and said a great many comical things, which used to make the poor Duke of Marlborough laugh.

"And for this reason only I had him often in the country and the town. He used to be like a sort of domestic in the house, always shrugging up his shoulders and finding fault that with such a father and mother the children could have so bad a behaviour."<sup>2</sup>

After the Duke's death, the Duchess, for sentimental reasons, would probably have allowed Dean Jones to remain at Blenheim, at least for a time. But she suddenly got rid of him, and not without cause. She declares that she discovered that "he was playing a double game," since he was on confidential terms with Lord Bolingbroke. She opened by mistake a letter that was put into her hand just after the Duke's death, to find that it was meant for Dean Jones, and that it was written by Bolingbroke.<sup>3</sup>

"I have had demonstration since that no one person has contributed so much as Dean Jones has done—with all his holiness—to possess all sorts of people with every falsehood that could do me mischief, which must be purely to please my Lady G. (Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough) because I never had any quarrel with him, and have served him and his family in everything he desired for more than eight years."<sup>4</sup>

After the Dean quitted Blenheim the Duchess only saw him once, and then for the space of "two minutes," and she intimates she had not wished to see him at all. Her friend Lady Lechmere shared her opinion of the discredited chaplain. She met him at Bath, and in a letter to the Duchess says:

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

"Dean Jones will always be Dean Jones, and therefore in no danger of deceiving anybody that knows him, for falsehood, I believe, is inseparable from his composition, and I fancy 'twould be as easy to make his inside as fair as it ought to be as his outside clean."<sup>1</sup>

But that may have been mere spiteful gossip. The Dean must have had some good qualities, or the Duke, who was an exceptionally keen judge of men, would not have made him chaplain. It is clear, however, that he was not a favourite with the ladies, probably, in part at least, because he was too much interested in himself, and was not, to put it mildly, the soul of discretion.

Addison, of course, knew the Duchess, and the autograph manuscript of his poem on Rosamond is still at Blenheim, with a courtly dedication in his own handwriting. Steele, whom the Duke befriended as a young officer who had not yet won his spurs in letters, was on cordial terms with her. Pope used to visit the Duchess in her widowhood, and she greatly appreciated his witty letters to her. Voltaire made a pilgrimage to Blenheim to see the palace and pay his respects to its mistress.

Pope, when the Duchess was at Wimbledon, seems to have driven over frequently from Twickenham, and it is certain, from one of his own letters at Blenheim, that, though he was not exactly a "distressed poet," he was under substantial obligations to her. In one of them he says:

"I owe you more than I daresay you remember. First I owe you my house and gardens at Twickenham, for you would have purchased them for me when you thought me fond of them. Secondly, I owe you a coach and horses, notwithstanding I fought you down to an arm-chair, and the other day I but named a house in town, and I saw with what attention you listened to it, and what you meant by that attention."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

He adds that he had found the price so exorbitant that he had determined to buy another house, which he declared was not unlike himself, since it was "pretty old and very crazy." Then he ends:

"What can I say to Your Grace? You think the same things, read the same books, like the same people that I do. Be so good to like me a little and be assured I shall love you extremely \* \* \* and I will declare myself to all the world for your devoted friend."<sup>1</sup>

In another he gives her a broad hint. She had been unwell, and he wrote to ask after her health: "I shall only add I sincerely wish it better than my own and you younger than I, that the tables may be turned and I leave you a legacy at my death."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion we find him declaring that "the Duchess has loaded me with presents," and that he loved her better than her venison. He banters her about Socrates, whom he calls her "ghostly father," and in another lively epistle expresses the wish that she would drive over to Twickenham to see his grotto and make him happy at least for a few hours by her company.<sup>3</sup> The Duchess had not the chance of leaving Pope a legacy, for he died before her. It would be well for his reputation if the story of his friendship with the Duchess ended there. But towards the close of his life, when, as he wittily put it, he was dying of a hundred favourable symptoms, and the Duchess was in much the same case, he crawled to her bedside and read the brilliant but bitter verses on the character of Atossa. This poem was afterwards inserted in the last edition of the "Moral Essays" which he placed in the hands of his executors.

Bishop Warburton states that Pope told the Duchess that the character of Atossa was meant to describe the

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Duchess of Buckingham. Horace Walpole adds that he read it also to that lady, and assured her that he intended it for the Duchess of Marlborough. The latter suspected that it was intended to describe herself, and, as Walpole asserts, gave the despicable poet a thousand pounds for its suppression. It is certain that late in life Pope received that sum from her, but there is no direct evidence that the gift was conditional. However that may be, his conduct was unpardonable, for the letters already cited show plainly that the Duchess always treated him with great generosity. His conduct appears all the worse when it is borne in mind that he printed off an entire edition of "Moral Essays," which included "Atossa." He died in May, 1744, and the Duchess only survived him a few months. Ill as she was when she heard of his death, she asked Lord Marchmont to find out whether Pope had written any satire on the Duke or herself. Marchmont properly appealed to Bolingbroke, whom Pope had made his literary executor. Bolingbroke at once recognized that the unflattering portrait of Atossa was intended for the Duchess. But the volume was printed, and it duly appeared. Bolingbroke's words to Marchmont are significant; they seem, indeed, to show that the thousand pounds had been given expressly for its suppression. He said: "There could be no excuse for Pope's design of publishing it—after the favour you and I know." If any further proof is needed of Pope's ingratitude, it is supplied by a comment, added in pencil by Marchmont's executor, to the sentence from his letter to Bolingbroke just cited—"£1,000." There needs no comment; the facts speak for themselves.

Voltaire, when he was at Blenheim, was curious to see the Memoirs which gossip asserted that the Duchess was writing. His visit took place in the autumn of 1727, when, turning to her, he asked if

he might be honoured with a glimpse of the manuscript. "Wait a little," exclaimed the Duchess. "I am at present altering my account of Queen Anne's character. I have begun to love her again since the present lot have become our governors."<sup>1</sup> She was flattered, however, that a man of such genius should take an interest in her literary avocations, and accordingly, with sudden impulsiveness, asked the philosopher if he would accept the task of putting her materials into shape. Oliver Goldsmith, who tells the story, states that Voltaire was at first inclined to accept the commission, but, when he had examined the document, drew off, and remonstrated with the Duchess on the bitter note which dominated them, and the grave indiscretion which would be committed by her in the publication of secrets which were communicated under the seal of friendship. The Duchess, who up to this point had regarded him as an agreeable man, broke off her overtures with a show of indignation. "I thought," she said afterwards, "the man had sense, but I find him at bottom either a fool or a philosopher." It was a loss to the world, for Voltaire's description of all that passed between Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman in the days when they first worshipped and then scorned each other would have been not less brilliant than piquant, though there are parts of the story over which, with all his shining gifts, he would have tripped, as is conclusively shown by his passing allusions to it in "The Age of Louis XIV."

But on other grounds Voltaire had good reason to remember his visit to Blenheim. He was busily engaged at the time in writing his "History of Charles XII.," which was afterwards published in Paris in 1731. The Duchess was always ready to talk about the achievements, military or diplomatic,

<sup>1</sup> Goldsmith's Works, ed. Cunningham, vol. iv., p. 24.



of Marlborough, and when her guest turned the conversation to the Duke's historic mission to Sweden in 1707, she appears to have given Voltaire a vivid account of what had happened on that occasion, as well as Marlborough's impressions of the King. Her statements were so valuable and detailed that it is asserted Voltaire obtained "many of his facts first-hand from the Duchess of Marlborough."<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the reign of George II. the Duchess told Queen Caroline that she intended to walk in the state procession at the Coronation, even if, through her lameness, she had to do so on crutches. Her Majesty expressed her concern, but the Duchess carried out her purpose, and walked with other peeresses in her robes of state. In Palace Yard the procession was brought to a prolonged halt, and the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough, who was nearly seventy, demanded a drum from one of the military bands, and calmly seated herself upon it, much to the amusement of the crowd, who loudly cheered the indomitable lady.<sup>2</sup> Queen Caroline declared at the time of the Coronation that the Duchess had more money at her disposal than she had herself, and yet she badgered Her Majesty for appointments at the Court for her relatives.

Her chief distractions in old age, apart from the purchase of landed estates, were the completion of Blenheim, the writing of her memoirs about her relations with Queen Anne, and the arrangements of the Duke's voluminous papers for an authoritative biography which she commissioned, but which ultimately came to nothing. Her first concern after the Duke's death was to carry out, in accordance with the terms of his will, the great design which

<sup>1</sup> Tallentyre, "Life of Voltaire," p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> See the testimony of an eyewitness, M. César de Saussure, in "A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I. and George II." (1902).

Vanbrugh had begun. Personally she cared very little for the palace, but she desired to have it completed, since she said it was the Duke's "passion" to have it done, and in that, as in everything else, his wishes were sacred to her. In the closing years of her life she was seldom in residence at Blenheim. The place was haunted with memories, and she never could forget how Queen Anne, at a time when Harley and Lady Masham<sup>1</sup> were in ascendancy, had flouted the Duke and stopped the works by the simple process of refusing to grant further supplies. When George I. came to the throne the matter was settled on more generous lines. The Crown took the chief responsibility, but the Duke was held responsible for part of the charges. The private and state apartments were finished before the Duke's death, but the rest of the palace and its immediate surroundings were still in confusion. The Duchess determined that, since Blenheim was to go down to posterity as an enduring memorial of his military genius, nothing should be left undone to render it at once stately and impressive. She declared that she toiled to crown the edifice in the early days of her widowhood as if she were "labouring for her bread." Her motive was not personal, for she much preferred the Old Lodge at Windsor, her new residence at Wimbledon, and Marlborough House. But since Blenheim was to stand foursquare to all the winds that blew, in remembrance of a man she had always loved, in her own fashion, with an undivided heart, she bent her energies without stint to the task of making it a house that would appeal to the imagination of succeeding generations, as well as be a worthy

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Masham, husband of Abigail Hill, was one of the twelve Tory peers created in 1712. Contemporary opinion of Lady Masham is shown by the contemptuous epithet applied to her—"an upstart of yesterday." See "Queen Anne Vindicated," London, 1714, p. 26.

home for her own descendants. She completed and enriched, not merely the palace, but its picturesque surroundings. She completed the great library—one of the most spacious and imposing rooms in England, which was originally intended for a ballroom and picture-gallery—and adorned it with a statue of Queen Anne in her Coronation robes, a sufficient proof that her resentment against her royal mistress had softened with the flight of years.

Literature and art made their appeal on the walls of Blenheim in the choice collection of classical books, known as the Sunderland Library, and in many famous pictures, the most renowned of which was a masterpiece of Raphael's, the *Ansidei Madonna*, which is now one of the chief treasures of the National Gallery. William Hazlitt left on record his opinion that Blenheim Palace, with one exception, was the finest house in England for the display of works of art. He laid stress on the masterpieces by Rubens, and declared that some of the greatest triumphs of that painter were on the walls of Blenheim.

"The old Duchess of Marlborough was fond of the historical pieces of this great painter; she had, during her husband's war and negotiations in Flanders, a fine opportunity of culling them 'as one picks pears,' saying, 'This I like, that I like still better,' and from the selection she has made it appears that she understood the master's genius well."<sup>1</sup>

The great critic is also responsible for the statement that the Titians at Blenheim were discovered in an old lumber-room by Sir Joshua Reynolds. They were presented to the first Duke by the King of Sardinia, for whose ancestor they were painted.

The Sunderland Library was the outcome of that passion for collecting which was not the least admirable trait in the character of Charles, Earl of

<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt, "Criticism on Art," 1843.

Sunderland. He was the greatest bibliophile of his time, and spared no expense in making a collection of manuscripts and early printed books which eventually found its way—in acknowledgment, it is said, of a financial loan from his father-in-law—into the possession of the Churchills. The Duchess cared little for literary rarities or sumptuous first editions. She declared in her own impulsive fashion her only books—it was not strictly true—were men and cards, and when, in her widowhood, the King of Denmark proffered the sum of £30,000 for the collection, she was all for closing with the royal offer. The Sunderland Library—it was created between the years 1710 and 1728—remained at Blenheim until 1872, when it was sold under the hammer by John Winston, sixth Duke. It realized roughly £30,000, the sum which the King of Denmark more than a century earlier had offered for it. The palace, happily, is still adorned by many fine historical portraits of the Churchills and the Spencers, by Vandyck, Kneller, Closterman, in a later generation by Romney and Reynolds, and in modern times by Carolus Duran and Sargent. About one of these pictures a story is told which, since it concerns Sarah, Duchess, may be cited. Closterman was commissioned to paint a great canvas which still hangs at Blenheim, representing John, Duke, Sarah, Duchess, and their children. The Duchess grew fatigued at the artist's demands for sittings, and in a certain pique expressed her revolt. The Duke afterwards declared that he had had as much trouble in bringing the painter and his wife to terms as in fighting a battle.

The palace is rich in sculpture, and, besides a magnificent marble bust by Rysbrack, of John, Duke—a marvellous work of art which is alive with expression—contains not a few examples of classic workmanship. Blenheim, moreover, is being en-

riched by the present Duke by a choice collection of books which perhaps in time may rival the Sunderland Library. The allegorical frescoes by La Guerre which adorn the grand salon retain to this day their exquisite colouring, and have always been regarded as the masterpiece of that painter, whilst the painted ceiling of the hall, which commemorates the victory of Blenheim in 1704, is one of the most famous examples of the artistic powers of Sir James Thornhill.

The Duchess finished the private chapel, and erected within it a splendid marble monument, by Rysbrack, to the memory of the Duke, and constructed beneath its tessellated floor the vault, where she now rests beside the illustrious soldier.

The bridge across the lake, though she thought it ridiculous, was completed at a cost of £30,000 because the Duke had favoured the scheme. It contains a number of chambers, which were intended by Vanbrugh as a place of retreat in the hot days of summer; but the Duchess thought the idea fantastic, and from her day to the present time no attempt has been made to render them habitable. The bridge gives access from the splendid portico, with its lofty pillars, on the north front of the palace, to the broad avenue, which leads over thickly-wooded rising ground to the magnificent column of Victory, which she built on the most commanding spot in the park. It rises to a height of 130 feet, and is surmounted by a colossal figure of Marlborough, in Roman costume. It is a finely fluted Doric pillar, springing from a massive pedestal. On three sides of the pedestal are inscribed the Acts of Parliament which conferred the estates and honours on Marlborough and his descendants. On the remaining side, which faces the palace, is engraved an eloquent and masterly summary of the Duke's military achievements, which tradition asserts was written by Lord Bolingbroke in the days

when he had made peace with the Duchess. It ends with the words:

“ These are the actions of the Duke of Marlborough, performed in the compass of a few years—sufficient to adorn the annals of ages. The admiration of other Nations will be conveyed in latest posterity in the Histories even of the enemies of Britain. The sense which the British Nation had of his transcendent merits was expressed in the most solemn, most effectual and desirable manner. The Acts of Parliament inscribed on this Pillar shall stand as long as the British name and language last, illustrious monuments of Marlborough’s glory and of Britain’s Gratitude.”

The triumphal arch by which the park is approached from Woodstock was erected, like the monument, by the Duchess immediately after the light of her life went out. It is an extremely graceful trophy, on strictly classical lines of Corinthian architecture, and bears on one side an inscription in Latin, and on the reverse in English, which runs as follows:

“ This Gate was built the year after the death of the most illustrious John, Duke of Marlborough, by order of Sarah, his most beloved wife, to whom he left the sole direction of the many things that remained unfinished of this fabric. The services of this great man to his country the Pillar will tell which the Duchess has erected for a lasting monument of his glory and her affection for him. MDCCXXII.”

The gardens at Blenheim are, in their way, unrivalled, and it is only fair to remember that the Duchess created them. This was the subject of her last consultation with Vanbrugh. He told her that she could not do better than summon to her aid the best landscape gardener in England. She took the hint, and, after making inquiries, commissioned William Kent, who seems to have been recommended to her by the Earl of Burlington. Kent was an architect as well as a landscape gardener; indeed, he

excelled in many directions, for he was painter to George II., and chiselled the statue of Shakespeare in Poets' Corner. He also designed the Horse Guards, and Devonshire House, Piccadilly, and his advice must have been valuable to the Duchess when she took upon herself the task of completing Blenheim. It has been claimed for Kent that the modern park in England was his discovery, and his triumphs as a landscape gardener, not merely at Blenheim, but at Esher and at Kensington, were largely due to the respect which he showed towards Nature. In the happy phrase of Horace Walpole, Kent was the first "to leap the fence and show that the whole of Nature is a garden." It was Nathaniel Hawthorne who declared that the Garden of Eden could scarcely have been more beautiful than the private grounds at Blenheim: "The sunshine that I saw there rests upon my recollection of it, as if it were eternal. The lawns and glades are like the memory of places where one has wandered when first in love."

The Blenheim lake, which the Prince de Ligne, who was an authority, extolled, was the work of Lancelot Brown, gardener of Hampton Court. When "Capability Brown," as he was commonly called, made the Blenheim lake by covering a narrow valley in the park with water, obtained by arresting the flow of the Glyme, he was so delighted with his success that he exclaimed: "O Thames! thou wilt never forgive me!" He was as much of an autocrat as the Duchess, but she gave him a free hand, and their strong wills never clashed. He was so independent that he declined to improve the gardens at Hampton Court when requested to do so by George II., giving as his reason that he had too much respect for himself and his profession.

Blenheim park is 2,700 acres in area and twelve miles in circuit. Dr. Johnson extolled its beauties.

He wandered through its leafy glades with Boswell in the summer of 1776, and, impressed with the magnificence of the scenery, exclaimed: "You and I, sir, have, I think, seen together the extremes of what can be seen in Great Britain—the wild rough Island of Mull and Blenheim Park." Many of the magnificent forest trees which it contains, notably some immemorial oaks, give it a sylvan charm of rare beauty. The trees on the rising ground near the column of Victory give that historic monument an appropriate setting. They were planted some years after the fight at Blenheim, in clumps which roughly represented the disposition of the troops in Marlborough's mighty battle



## CHAPTER XXV

### IN DEFENCE OF THE DUCHESS

ADDISON, in his poem on "Blenheim," extols the calm and serene spirit of Marlborough, and in a famous simile describes him in the stress of battle as one who "rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm." The Duchess lived in the whirlwind, and failed conspicuously to direct the storm. The Duke was often at war, but the Duchess was never at peace. The spirit of revolt ran high in her, on her own admission. "I find it a perpetual war in this world to defend oneself against knaves and fools." That sweeping assertion touches her own weakness to the quick. Great things failed to ruffle Marlborough; small things were enough to break the peace of the Duchess. Her self-imposed tasks in old age made a direct demand upon her restless brain. One was the publication of her political Memoirs, and the other the preparation of the Duke's voluminous papers for the authoritative biography which was the dream of her last days. It was no sudden impulse which led her to write the once famous but now half-forgotten book, entitled "An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager-Duchess of Marlborough from her First Coming to Court to the Year 1710," which startled the world in 1742, when "Old Sarah," as Horace Walpole called her, was supposed to be dying. She lived two years longer, in spite of the physicians, who, in a confidential aside, whispered in her chamber: "Her Grace must be blistered, or she'll die." She rose in her bed, for deafness was not

one of her infirmities, and exclaimed, " I won't be blistered, and I won't die ! " and once more cheated the doctors.<sup>1</sup> The book is divided into three parts. The first, which describes the relations of the Princess Anne to her sister Queen Mary and William III., was written at the suggestion of Bishop Burnet, when he was collecting material for his " History of His Own Time." The second part, or rather the first draft of it, was written when the Duchess was abroad with the Duke in the years 1712-14. The original title proposed was " A Vindication of the Duchess of Marlborough," and, as it covered the whole period of her ascendancy at the Court of Anne, she intended to print it immediately, but, on the advice of Sir Robert Walpole, abandoned the idea, and eventually altered some of its statements. The third part took the shape of a refutation of the slanders about the abuse of her power as Mistress of the Robes, with which Swift and other writers had poisoned the public mind.

In her old age the Duchess, in spite of the burden of fourscore years, read over all the letters that had passed between herself and Queen Anne and other people, and endorsed the most important of them with comments. Then she turned to the manuscripts which she had written when smarting, in 1711, over her last dismissal by the Queen, and saw that there was ample material, if she could enlist the aid of a competent writer, for a book, which she was sanguine enough to think would set her right with the world. It was at this juncture that she turned to Pope. She was probably spurred to the task by Lord Bolingbroke, who had startled her by a request for materials for papers relative to the War of the Spanish Succession. Bolingbroke declared that he wanted to write

<sup>1</sup> " Letters of Horace Walpole," edited, with notes, by Mrs. Paget Toynbee; 16 vols., Oxford, 1905, vol. i., p. 140.

a book which might be "hung up" in the Temple of Truth, and he hinted that he proposed to do justice to certain parts of the Duke's career that had been censured. But the Duchess, though she was now on amicable terms with that statesman, and could never forget that the Duke had helped him at the start of his brilliant career, and was at one time warmly attached to him, was not to be drawn into any surrender of confidential documents. It is thought that she feared to what use he might turn such materials. Pope advised her to employ Nathaniel Hooke, a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, of ready pen, with whom he was on easy terms. The Duchess liked the man, and, as she never did anything by halves, offered him, in the days when Grub Street was still a reality, £5,000 to take down from her lips the story as she ultimately determined to tell it. He had only partial access to her papers, for the Duchess, propped up in bed, retained most of them in her own hands, making them the text of a revised version which she dictated with extraordinary energy, sometimes for six hours at a stretch.

The first draft of the "Vindication," or "Account of the Conduct" as it was afterwards called, of the Duchess of Marlborough was written shortly after her retirement from Court. If ever the phrase, "a veritable human document," was applicable, this historic manuscript merits such an accusation. Perhaps the most intolerable charge that can be brought against any man or woman of honour in the service of the Crown is that of an abuse of privilege. When Harley and Mrs. Masham between them compassed the downfall of the Duchess, slander was instantly let loose in dastardly pamphlets and lampoons which did their best to stab a woman's reputation. The Duchess was cut to the quick by these effusions of anonymous scribblers. Marlborough regarded his

own traducers for the most part with disdain, and met their attacks with silence. But the Duchess was more thin-skinned, and winced, not a little under what she regarded as the deliberate affront of attacks which assailed in the direction where she justly felt herself to be beyond suspicion. Hence, released from authority, she took up her pen and, to borrow her own phrase, "tumbled her mind out on paper" with pardonable resentment and undeniable vigour. She did well to be angry, if indignation is righteous when man or woman is charged with misdemeanours in the public service of which they are guiltless. She had at her elbow in 1711 her trusted friend and secretary, Arthur Maynwaring, who, though in failing health, had still at his command shrewd judgment and a clever pen. Between them—the Duke was still abroad—this document was written, and before citing some passages from it, it may be as well to state why it was not published. The Duchess, at the time it was written, was on intimate terms with Sir Robert Walpole, afterward first Earl of Orford. Walpole had been one of the Council of Prince George of Denmark when the latter was Lord High Admiral, and in that way she was brought into association with the rising young statesman. Feeling the need of advice on so delicate a matter, the Duchess submitted her manuscript to Sir Robert. He read it and declared that he was favourably impressed by it, but advised her not to publish it at the moment, adding that the Ministry would employ "all the pens of the most scurrilous people whom they had in their pay to write against her." Arthur Maynwaring declared that such an argument was ridiculous, and carried no weight, since all the lies against her that "malice could invent" were already in circulation. He left, of course, the decision to the Duchess, and she, believing Walpole, as she put it, "extremely her

friend," yielded to his advice, though much against her inclination. But in the winter of 1713-14, when she was with the Duke at Antwerp, she went over the manuscript again, but was brought to a halt because the letters which she intended to cite were in England; but in spite of the lack of such papers, she indited, with the help of a M. St. Priest, whom she employed as her amanuensis, a brief but vigorous refutation of the charges brought against her by scribblers in the press. Arthur Maynwaring was dead by this time. If he had lived, it was his purpose to have written, with a damaging appeal to facts in his possession, a circumstantial story of the treatment meted out, not merely to the Duchess, but the Duke. Whatever faults the Duchess of Marlborough possessed she was a woman of strict integrity. When she came to power at the Court of Anne, she urged the Queen to make an Order in Council, forbidding the mischievous system of selling preferments which had prevailed in previous reigns. She states that when she was appointed Mistress of the Robes, the only patronage at her disposal was three posts of Pages of the Back Stairs. These appointments, insignificant though they were, were naturally coveted by the sons of rich people eager to mount the first step on the ladder at Court. Up to that time such appointments had been sold at a thousand guineas a piece. The Duchess put a stop to such transactions. "I filled them up with three gentlemen unknown to me, who were admitted into them without paying a farthing to anyone whatever." She mentions their names, and adds that Lady Fitzharding, Lady Plymouth, and another lady of the Court recommended them. "The Queen had always duplicates of the accounts which she signed, and gave me receipts for all the money I paid to her own hand." Ambitious people not unfrequently approached the Duchess willing to purchase

a title for a consideration, but she invariably refused to lend herself to their designs. The Duchess states that she has been "compelled to mention these details because so much has been printed concerning my selling offices and getting money." It was a cruel slander, and she met it with spirit. "I take occasion to declare that I never in the whole reign had one shilling or the value of it, directly or indirectly, or any other consideration from any person, for any employment or other favour that ever I did them. I can appeal to the Queen herself if I have not often begged of Her Majesty never to let her favour be sold. But as she is the fountain of honour to give it, for a reward to great merit, and to men who would be a support to the Crown, which nobody would ever think himself that paid for his own advancement."

Her own statement of the reason why she lost favour, though at best but a half-truth, merits citation: "My several employments, as they were very considerable, were very much envied, and it was natural for those who had a mind to them to do me all the prejudice they could." Yet twenty Mrs. Mashams would never have driven her from power if her own mood had not been so haughty and unaccommodating. But apart from a conflict of temperaments, the Duchess was forced into retirement because Harley and Bolingbroke were determined to strike at Marlborough's most vulnerable point, which, from first to last, was the wife whom he adored.

The original document—it has never been printed—opens as follows:

"I hope it will not be said that I pretend to be an author because I think myself obliged to publish this paper to the world. No one is more sensible than I am how ridiculous that vanity is in a woman; but what is to follow may easily be written by anybody, being only a plain account of matters of fact. Yet I cannot help lamenting the misfortune I am under in

being forced to make such a public vindication of myself, and I hope I may be forgiven if I complain a little of the times which make it necessary for me to give proofs of my integrity, after more than twenty years faithful service."<sup>1</sup>

She proceeds to allude to the "scandalous falsehoods" which had been written against her, and which were "clearly designed to take away my reputation."<sup>2</sup> No woman ever suffered more cruelly in this respect, for all sorts of infamous accusations were brought against her, especially by the notorious Mrs. Manley, a worthless creature, whom Swift patronized, and who attacked the Duchess even on the score of morals in the pages of "The New Atalantis." But the Duchess, whose character in that respect was beyond challenge, could afford to treat such charges with disdain. She had lived for twenty years in the fierce light of a Court, and her reputation was absolutely unsullied. The charges against her, which really cut her to the quick, were that she had accepted bribes in return for titles or appointments at Court, and had enriched herself at the expense of the Crown. Here it may be as well to cite her own words:

"The chief accusations that have been made against me are either in relation to my accounts of the Robes and the Privy Purse, or in respect to the advantages which I have been paid to make of the Queen's favour, and particularly in the disposing of titles and employments."

It is a pity that the first draft of her "Vindication" was not published in the lifetime of Queen Anne, who declared that cheating was not one of the Duchess of Marlborough's faults. It was set aside, however, in deference to Walpole's advice, and it was only when her life was ending that the Duchess, who did not

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

wish to go down to posterity as a woman who had misused her power, resumed, after nearly thirty years, her interrupted task. Scarcely any citations from the book which she published in 1742 have been made in these pages, and for a deliberate reason. It is possible to defend the Duchess without making an appeal to what she wrote when her judgment was warped and her powers were failing.

"The Account" is rich in intimate sidelights on her own character, as well as all that happened at Court when she was Mistress of the Robes. But candour compels the admission that some of its statements were unguarded, and inaccuracy crept into the narrative, and the rankling sense of injustice has to be borne in mind in view of certain sweeping assertions. But when so much is admitted, it is unquestionably an honest statement of the facts as she recalled them with the clouded brain of old age. There were plenty of people alive in 1742 who did not love her, and if she had not told the truth, old as she was, they would have assailed her. But, though attempts of this kind were made, her integrity came out of the controversy unharmed. Lord Macaulay, who did more than any other historian to damage the Duke's reputation, pretends to regard the Duchess of Marlborough's "Account" with "constant suspicion," and thinks it ought to be read with reserve, except when she relates some instance of her own "malignity and insolence." That is quite worthy of a man who exhausted his unrivalled powers of invective and rhetoric in denouncing Marlborough and making charges against him, which were refuted in his own lifetime, though he had not a sufficient sense of justice, to say nothing of chivalry, to withdraw them when they were proved to be erroneous. The truth is that the greatest soldier that, in the opinion of the Duke of Wellington, ever led an army into action, and the



most brilliant woman that ever shaped the whispers of a Throne, have been grossly maligned by men like Swift and Macaulay, who by the magic of style turned slander into current coin.

Concerning Swift's charges let Thackeray speak, and all the more since his verdict in "Esmond" on the Duke does not lean to mercy.

"The power of satire ever hardly displayed itself in so mean and disgusting a form as in Swift's character of the Duke and his lady. The father of lies himself could not have invented sneers more diabolical. The Dean's strictures are scandalously mean, and what adds to their baseness is the fact manifested in many places in Swift's Diaries that he entertained the highest admiration for Marlborough."<sup>1</sup>

Yet for party purposes Swift did his best to besmirch both the reputation of Marlborough and the Duchess.

Concerning Macaulay, both Carlyle and John Stuart Mill spoke in no uncertain terms. The Chelsea sage is reported to have said that "four hundred editions" of the greatly belauded "History" could "not lend it any permanent value," since there was "no depth of sense in it."<sup>2</sup> The distinguished political economist asserted that Macaulay's volumes might be pleasant reading, but were not exactly history.<sup>3</sup>

Allusion has been made to the capacity of the Duchess as a woman of business. Perhaps in this connection it may be as well to cite one of her letters, especially as it incidentally reveals that in old age she did honour at Blenheim to the memory of Queen Anne. It is dated the 8th of August, 1738, and is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> "Stray Papers," by W. M. Thackeray, edited by Lewis Melville; London, 1901, pp. 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> "History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century," by G. P. Gooch; Longmans, 1913, cited pp. 303-4.

<sup>3</sup> "Mill's Letters"; London, 1910, vol. i, pp. 188-9

"I have made a very fine statue of Queen Anne, which will soon be brought to Blenheim. You would oblige me very much if you would send me an exact Drawing of the Bow-window in the Gallery: I only mean the bottom figured so that I may know how much Room there will be to go round the Figure when it is set up; and I should be glad likewise to have the measure of the Hall, the Length of it from the coming in to the Door into the Apartment and the Breadth, not taking in the Place which was once to have been a stair-case, where the marble Table stands. I have an account from Blenheim that you have finished the wall about the water; but they tell me the weeds are as bad as ever. I desired Mr. Armstrong to speak to you to make a computation what it would cost to finish that Gate which they call Bladon Gate, where a woman has a House that looks ugly. There is stiles for foot-people to come over, and I would only have a strong plain Gate no more than such as Gentlemen commonly have in their Parks to let Coaches in, or anything else when I please, without any House. I should be glad if you would let me, as soon as you can, have your accounts, that all things may be evened by your Friend and humble Servant, S. MARLBOROUGH."<sup>1</sup>

When her granddaughters one by one married, the Duchess grew more and more lonely, and lavished her affections, so she states, on three little dogs:

"I am very fond of my three dogs; they have all of them gratitude, wit, and good sense—things very rare to be found in this country. They are fond of going out with me; but when I reason with them and tell them it is not proper, they submit, and watch for my coming home, and meet me with as much joy as if I had never given them good advice."<sup>2</sup>

She took long solitary walks when her physical powers were equal to them, though seldom going farther than her own domains. She went little into

<sup>1</sup> Exact copy from the original document in possession of the writer.

<sup>2</sup> This was written in 1737, and is given in a curious little volume, entitled "Opinions of the Duchess of Marlborough."

society, and towards the end was powerless to do so, for she was crippled with rheumatism, and when she wished to sun herself had to be carried from her apartments by her servants. She was passionately fond of music and of cards, and spent long hours, when the curtains were drawn and the wax candles were lighted, in reading and arranging old letters and scribbling her comments—they were often caustic—on men and manners. When at Marlborough House, she often went to the Opera; and when driven to Windsor Lodge by illness, she purchased a chamber organ, the finest of its kind in England, which Handel had praised, and sat in a high chair listening to its music.

She had lived so much at the centre, and retained so active a mind, that it was difficult for her to dwell at the circumference with unruffled composure. The dull monotony of a country life often irked her; but when it did so she used to laugh, and say she was out of humour with the town, and to add that an old woman counted for nothing in the world of fashion. The great haunting questions of a future life made their appeal to her, and in her perplexity she turned to Pope and Bolingbroke, only to find that they were dumb oracles. She found her chief solace in a translation of Socrates; and her faith, such as it was, in immortality never wavered. She has often been described as a hard, worldly woman; but no one can think that who has seen her private papers. Once, in old age, one of her friends, who was on sufficient terms with her, entered in the twilight, unannounced, the room in which she commonly sat. In the growing darkness he stumbled over something on the floor, and, to his consternation, found it was the Duchess. He asked if she were ill, and she replied: "No, I am only praying. I am so wicked a woman that I lie on the floor rather than kneel." However it may

have been in the days of her splendid and almost unrivalled power, Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in old age, as that act of self-abasement shows, was conscious of her own frailty. Her own words may be recalled in this connection: "I am not so partial to myself as not to know that I have many imperfections."

Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, crossed her path towards the end of her life. She was the patron of George Whitefield, and a woman whom religion made radiant. The Duchess had known many courtly latitudinarian Bishops, agreeable, accomplished men of the world, who were ready to talk about anything but religion. When she heard that Whitefield preached with impassioned ardour, she betrayed a sudden desire to hear him. But illness prevented her. So Lady Huntingdon came to see her, and improved the occasion. The Duchess afterwards wrote to her:

"God knows we all need mending, and none more than myself. I have lived to see great changes in the world, have acted a conspicuous part, and now hope in my old days for mercy. Your Ladyship must direct me. You are all goodness and kindness, and I often wish I had a portion of it. Women of wit, beauty and quality cannot bear too many humiliating truths—they shock our pride—but we must die. I always feel more happy and contented after an hour's conversation with you, than after a whole week's round of amusements. Perhaps my wicked heart may get some good from you in the end."<sup>1</sup>

Religion, in the spiritual acceptance of the term, hardly seems to have touched her.

It cannot be said of her that she conquered the art of growing old gracefully; but she became more kindly and considerate to those about her, and when she saw unmerited distress was quick to relieve it.

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon"; two vols., London, 1840; vol. i., p. 25.

When in Antwerp in 1713-14, the Duchess, on the testimony of an eyewitness, won the hearts of rich and poor alike by her acts of mercy to the sick and afflicted. We are assured that she went up and down the city on errands of mercy, and was accustomed to carry money and other gifts with her own hands to anyone whom she discovered in desperate straits. When the Duke and herself quitted the city on their return to England, there was an outburst of regret at their departure. It found expression on the lips of the Governor, the Marquis of Terracena, who, when they embarked at Ostend, told them that "if they were received at London with the same joy as they had been taken leave of with grief at Antwerp, the Ministry would have just cause to take umbrage at their popularity."<sup>1</sup> Few people in that hard century troubled themselves at all deeply with the social condition of the poor. The Duchess of Marlborough was an exception to this rule. She built almshouses at St. Albans, as has already been stated. She clothed old men and women at Woodstock, and in her last illness at Marlborough House one little incident at least can be cited which reveals her warm heart. She was too ill to leave her apartment, and, as the chimney of her sick-chamber was defective, a mere child was introduced with his brush to put it right. She watched from her bed the little fellow disappear, and return when his task was accomplished. He was miserably clad and looked half famished, and, ill as she was, she gave orders that the poor climbing boy was not merely to be fed, but clothed and shod. It was a small thing in itself, but the Duchess has so often been depicted as a callous and selfish woman that a circumstance which reveals her in another light ought assuredly to be recorded.

Shortly after the Duke's death, in 1722, the Duchess

<sup>1</sup> "Queen Anne Vindicated," London, 1714, pp. 29, 30.

was urged by his friends to entrust to some competent hand the preparation of an authoritative book descriptive of his military career. The proposal was one which entirely chimed in with her own wishes, and, accordingly, waiving aside other writers who besieged her with requests to be entrusted with the papers for such a purpose, her choice fell on Lord Molesworth. Here it becomes necessary to correct an error which occurs in Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," in a chapter devoted to the literary work of Mallet. He states that after Lord Molesworth died the Duke's papers, which were in his possession, were "transferred with the same design to Richard Steele, who, in some of his exigencies, put them in pawn." The last part of this statement is probable enough, for Steele was habitually careless as well as impecunious; but it is certain they could not have been in his possession after Molesworth's death, since the latter outlived the essayist by more than thirty years. The truth seems to be that Steele was entrusted with certain important papers for a book which he proposed to write on "The War in Flanders," from the date of Marlborough's commission of Captain-General and Plenipotentiary to his dismissal on the 31st of December, 1711. This proposed book was publicly announced as in preparation by Steele as early as the spring of 1714, and it was stated that it would be based on authentic materials which appear to have been placed at his discretion by the Duke, who held him in high regard.

Steele made no effort to carry out his self-imposed task, and the papers which he had treated so cavalierly were eventually recovered by the indignant Duchess. They were then handed to Richard, third Viscount Molesworth, who was one of Marlborough's famous officers. The Duchess held Molesworth in peculiar esteem, for he had not only fought by the

Duke's side at Blenheim, but at Ramillies had, as His Grace's Aide-de-Camp, saved his life at the risk of his own. Lord Molesworth was a soldier who rose ultimately to the rank of Field-Marshal, but, though a brilliant swordsman, he had not the pen of a ready writer. The materials with which he was confronted were, moreover, far more voluminous than those which had once been in the risky possession of Steele, and towards the close of the Duchess's life he seems reluctantly to have abandoned the project.

Her choice ultimately fell on David Mallet, a poet and miscellaneous writer, who held a secretarial appointment under Frederick, Prince of Wales. With Mallet was associated Richard Glover, another indifferent poet, who was stoutly opposed to Sir Robert Walpole, and therefore found favour in the eyes of the Duchess. He was afterwards M.P. for Weymouth, but his qualifications for such a task as writing a Life of Marlborough were not conspicuous. The Duchess declared that she was convinced that Mr. Glover was a very honest man, and that he had the welfare of England at heart. She accordingly bequeathed a handsome legacy both to Glover and Mallet, and left directions that they were to have access to all necessary papers. She stated in her will that she was "particularly anxious that it should be pointed out in the book that the Duke wished justice to all mankind," and added that he left James II. with "great regret" because he would do nothing to "settle Popery" on the nation. But the two writers were not to be allowed to use their own unfettered discretion. The Duchess states in her will that she was "extremely desirous" that the work should be done well, and therefore she requested the Earl of Chesterfield, who was substantially remembered in that document, to supervise their labours.

Glover appears to have resented this proviso, and he honourably declined the proposal. Mallet accordingly received the legacy, toyed with the voluminous papers, gave himself for years an air of consequence, and, though he outlived the Duchess by more than twenty years, died, to his lasting disgrace, without doing anything. Dr. Johnson's comment merits citation:

"Mallet, I believe, never wrote a single line of his projected Life of the Duke of Marlborough. He groped for materials, and thought of it till he had exhausted his mind. Thus it sometimes happens that men entangle themselves in their own schemes."<sup>1</sup>

The odd thing is that Mallet had the audacity to tell Hume that the book was ready for the press. "That is more than I or most people expected" was the historian's dry comment.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile unauthorized biographies, great and small, duly appeared as the eighteenth century ran its course; but it was left to Archdeacon Coxe to classify not all, but the majority of, the Blenheim Papers in the reign of George III. Dr. Coxe, for a considerable term of years, was constantly at Blenheim, arranging the documents and making extracts from them. They were scattered at that time in various parts of the palace, and it is clear that he at best only made a hasty and superficial examination of many of the packets. Moreover, long after he had completed his labours, many other packets came to light. Out of the papers which he arranged and classified, Dr. Coxe obtained the materials from which he wrote his authoritative "Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough," illustrated with portraits, maps, and military plans. The first edition appeared

<sup>1</sup> Boswell's "Life of Johnson," edited by George Birkbeck Hill, D.C.L.; Oxford, 1887; six vols., iii., p. 86. See also note on Mallet and Hume on same page.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



in 1818-19, in three quarto volumes, and was at once recognized, not merely as a biography of singular merit, but as an historical work of reference, which threw vivid side-lights on the reigns of William III. and Queen Anne. The present writer can bear witness to the fidelity and care of Archdeacon Coxe, and feels it is his duty to do so, as he is the only person since the beginning of last century who has had the opportunity of examining in detail the original materials which form the basis of the book.

Dr. Coxe's arrangement of the historical and family papers at Blenheim had fallen, by the middle of the Victorian era, into hopeless confusion, and the clue to its interpretation had been lost. In 1889 the late Duke of Marlborough honoured the writer by asking him to solve the difficulty, which, at first, seemed insuperable. There were press-marks on many of the packets, showing that part, at least, of the great collection of papers had been examined and sorted; but there were hundreds of packets which bore no such endorsement. After prolonged search at the Palace, the writer came across Dr. Coxe's original manuscript catalogue, and at once the press-marks on the packets mentioned became clear. Most of the papers indicated were identified, but not all, and certain packets had evidently been removed. It was on the basis of Dr. Coxe's catalogue that the present greatly expanded classification took shape and was carried to completion. When the task was nearly completed, the Duke found in a roomy forgotten cupboard at Blenheim a great mass of papers which, it soon became apparent, Dr. Coxe had never seen. Some of them were large brown-paper parcels, bearing labels in faded ink, "Of No Importance," "Household Accounts," etc. When these bundles were opened, they justified, for the most part, such endorsements. But mixed up with butlers' accounts,

estate papers of little significance, and other memoranda of a great house, were several documents of permanent and unique historical value, which are now placed in their proper sequence in the collection. Among these documents, recovered in 1889-90 by the writer, were the original parchment appointing Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, Mistress of the Robes to Queen Anne,<sup>1</sup> and another small bit of vellum which proved to be the first military commission of Marlborough. The latter bears the sign-manual of Charles II., and appoints John Churchill "Ensigne in our own Company of Foote in our Regiment of Guards, commanded by Colonel John Russell, given at our Court of Whitehall, September 14th, 1667."<sup>2</sup> Many parcels also came to light, chiefly dealing with military organization and the movements of the troops in Flanders, which had remained untouched since they had been arranged under Marlborough's own supervision towards the close of his life. It was left to the present writer to unbind the red tape which had held them since the beginning of the reign of George I., and to place their contents in their proper sequence amongst the archives, now preserved in the fireproof muniment-room, which the present Duke constructed some years ago for the proper custody of the priceless historical records of the Churchills. The present work could not, of course, have been written if the Duke of Marlborough had not given the writer unfettered access to the papers, which he arranged twenty-five years ago for the late Duke.

In the summer of 1744 it became plain to those about the Duchess that the end was approaching. She had entered her eighty-fifth year, had warmed, in Landor's phrase, both hands at the fire of life, and now that it burnt low was ready to depart. A new generation had come into possession of all that

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

made life worth living to her. The man who had adored her had been dead for more than twenty years, and the only children whom she had really loved had vanished from her sight long before Marlborough had been carried to his grave in Westminster Abbey. It was forty years after the Battle of Blenheim had been fought, and since the splendour of that victory she had had enough of human praise and blame. Her own words are significant: "If I could have walked out of this world, I would have departed long ago if only to get rid of so many tiresome people."<sup>1</sup> She was weary in mind and crippled in body, and as summer passed into autumn she felt that her own long and wonderful day was over, and, like a tired child, longed for rest. The end came gently on the 19th of October, 1744, at Marlborough House, and the grief of her household was so deep and real as to show that those who were most constantly about her had learnt to care for her in a sense that no money could have purchased.

William Pitt, afterward first Earl of Chatham, had only been nine years in the House of Commons when the Duchess died, and so far chiefly distinguished himself by his fierce invectives against Walpole. The Great Commoner was then a man of six-and-thirty, with his way to make in public life; but the Duchess was shrewd enough to see his promise, and to believe without stint in his patriotic devotion to England. She therefore, by the terms of her will, surprised the world, as well as the young statesman, by bequeathing £10,000 to William Pitt, as well as landed property in Buckingham, Suffolk, and Northamptonshire, stating that she had done so "on account of his merit in the noble defence he had made for the support of the laws of England and to prevent the ruin of his country." The political prescience of

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

the Duchess, as well as her patriotism, are apparent in that timely gift to a public man who at that stage of his career was slenderly endowed by fortune.

The Duchess was laid to rest by her own instructions in the private chapel at Blenheim, and it was characteristic of her that, in an age when large sums were lavished on the obsequies of great people, she directed that her own funeral should be marked by simplicity. Her last wishes were fulfilled shortly afterwards by the removal of the Duke's body from Westminster to the vault where it now lies in victorious peace side by side with that of the woman that he loved with unflinching devotion.

There is no need, in view of all that these pages reveal, for an elaborate estimate of the character of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough; but, even at the risk of the charge of repetition, some of her outstanding characteristics ought, in these final pages, to be cited. The world often seizes upon the weak aspects of a great reputation, and the verdict of history has been merciless in regard to her freaks and foibles. She was assailed in her lifetime by mean and scurrilous writers, and since then a hundred pens have found ample material for ridicule and scorn in the petulant outbursts of a woman of quality, who always wore her heart on her sleeve and never pretended to conceal her personal resentments. The Duchess acted often in so high-handed a manner, and spoke so frequently unadvisedly with her lips, that it is, after all, the easiest thing in the world to dismiss her as an imperious woman with a bitter tongue. It speaks little for the chivalry of Horace Walpole, and less for the judicial impartiality of Lord Macaulay, that the Duchess of Marlborough should be mentioned in the letters of the one and in the history of the other in terms of bitter contempt. It is more easy to understand why Swift, and his despicable creature Mrs.

Manley, assailed the reputation of the most brilliant and powerful woman of their age. The Duchess of Marlborough blocked the way of Harley and St. John at the Court of Queen Anne; she could neither be bribed nor coerced, and therefore Swift directed his satire against her, and Mrs. Manley, a woman without a scrap of moral reputation, trumped up a story against her chastity. The Duchess could afford to toss her head at such vile imputations, and the worst charges that were brought against her are as dead as Queen Anne. That is not to say that the Duchess of Marlborough was in other directions impeccable. She had her faults, and that they were grievous it is impossible to deny. The pity is that the majority of writers have magnified and caricatured them without any recognition of the other side of the question. They have tried to laugh the Duchess out of court by insisting on her caprices, most of which are self-revealed. There has been a conspiracy of silence in literature concerning the shining qualities and the patriotic services of a woman who has left her mark on the annals of the English Court.

The Duchess of Marlborough has heightened the gaiety of mankind by her foibles, her freakish limitations, her contempt for authority, her open and unabashed determination to do as she liked. Even Dr. Johnson, who admired vigour in a man, but was inclined to resent it in a woman, could find nothing worse to say of her after her death than that she was bold, and knew how to make the most of her opportunities in life. Mrs. Morley has been accepted with the plaudits of one generation after another as "Good Queen Anne"; it is surely high time that Mrs. Freeman should have fair play, and all the more because of the manner in which her services as well as her virtues have been ignored. That she was a great woman in no common acceptation of the term—

perhaps the greatest who has ever held authority at the English Court—is a contention which, though long ignored, cannot now be seriously challenged. It has been claimed for her, and with justice, that through some of the most glorious and difficult years in the national annals she steadied the hand which upheld the sceptre. In an age of political venality and moral licence she led the fearless and open life of one who had no cause for shame.

No shadow rests upon her integrity when Mistress of the Robes, and though great sums of public money passed through her hands, she was able to account for every shilling. Queen Anne did her only simple justice when she acknowledged her strict probity. Yet no charges were too disgraceful for hireling scribblers to bring against "Queen Zarah," as they called her, except the dastardly attacks which such malicious pens made on "Prince Mirabel," as they were pleased to call the Duke. Marlborough at the moment when he had reached a dazzling pinnacle of fame in Europe was hounded out of public life. The irony of it all was that he might have baffled his adversaries at home as splendidly as he had vanquished the enemy abroad but for the blazing indiscretions of the Duchess. Bishop Burnet, perhaps the most shrewd of all the spectators of Marlborough's dismissal, believed that Harley and St. John would not have gained their way if the Duchess had been more discreet. The irony of life leaps to light in such an admission, for no one can question the devotion of the Duchess to her husband, though it was never marked by the wise patience and delicate chivalry which distinguished his attitude to her.

Insolent slander apart, what were her faults? Swift accused her of avarice, but the poison of asps was under the Dean's tongue. Fielding, writing in her old age, laughed to scorn such an imputa-

tion. He declared that the Duchess of Marlborough had filled her high place at the Court of Anne with absolute fidelity. He held that she was guiltless of mean as well as dishonest acts, and adds: "She saved the Queen vast sums of money, which might have sunk into her own pocket." He did not believe that any charge, whether of "public rapaciousness or private exaction," could possibly be substantiated. As to the charge of avarice, he declared that he did not believe that any man or woman of that epoch had equalled the Duchess of Marlborough in acts of private munificence, and he pointed not only to individuals, but to families, who owed their preservation to her generosity. Fielding called the Duchess of Marlborough a "glorious woman," and added that he never contemplated her character except with admiration. She helped a distressed poet in the person of John Gay, author of "The Beggar's Opera," when the luckless fellow's fortunes had sunk to a disastrous ebb. She cared for the poor at her own gates, and sent her charity far afield by the timely gift of a thousand pounds to help a number of Swiss peasants to emigrate to America. She advanced a great sum of money to the Government to ward off a financial crisis, and she came to the help of Child's Bank when there was a run on its resources.

When it is added to all this that the Duchess gave away in her widowhood upwards of a quarter of a million of money, it will be seen that, though the charge of avarice may be brought against the Duke, it breaks down absolutely in regard to her. What, then, were her faults? Perfect people are fatiguing company, and the Duchess was altogether too honest to wish, living or dead, to be numbered with them. She said herself, "I have plenty of faults," but, like the rest of us, she was inclined to regard some of her most repellent traits as virtues. Everybody knows

the direction in which her weakness lay. Scores of clever pens, which the world credits with historical accuracy, have magnified her weaknesses, ridiculed her acts of indiscretion, and fashioned their indictment, of one of the most fearless and capable women in English history, into the cruel coin of literary contempt, with the result that, as a recent writer put it, "the Duchess has come down to us scolding."

The real charges that could be brought against her were not lawless passion, avarice, or fraud. They were, with one exception, the kind of weaknesses which do not waken reprobation, but are provocative of satire. Every educated man and woman, since the days of George II. to the present time, has found in them food for reflection when in serious mood, and material for mirth in more careless hours. Her faults were pride of will, an imperious, exacting, unaccommodating temper, an appalling freedom of speech, which was too often made the vehicle of quick and unwarrantable suspicions and bitter and censorious opinions. Her common-sense was shrewd, hard, intuitive, and it seldom failed her; but it was linked with a careless disdain of other people's feelings which was sometimes pushed to the point of sheer and almost brutal callousness. The liberty of speech which the Duchess claimed for herself was seldom allowed by her to others. Her self-assertion was boundless; she was as fearless in her strife of words as ever Marlborough was amid the clash of swords. What she lacked was the Duke's imperturbable coolness, his perfect courtesy, his invincible patience.

In Queen Anne's closet at Windsor, where Her Majesty received the first tidings of Blenheim—the little alcove now forms part of the Royal Library—there may be seen a small but handsomely-bound volume, which was presented to Queen Anne by



John, Duke of Marlborough. It is a copy of Henry Peacham's once-famous book, "The Compleat Gentleman," and it contains an autograph inscription by the Duke. Marlborough himself might have borne that title. He was on the testimony of one of his officers the "best bred man in the nation."<sup>1</sup> We are also told, on the same authority, how the Duke cared for the common soldiers who served under him, many of whom, when they enlisted, were the "dregs of the nation." He infused into them "a spirit above the vulgar," and made brave and well-disciplined troops out of such unpromising material. It is recorded that, shortly after the Duke gave "The Compleat Gentleman" to Queen Anne, he was galloping across open ground—when the siege of Menin was in progress in 1709—in order to reconnoitre the enemy's position. General Cadogan was at his side, and the equerries were in attendance. Marlborough suddenly dropped his glove, and, instead of telling one of the equerries to pick it up, he turned to Cadogan, and told him to dismount and bring it back, an order which was instantly obeyed. That night in camp the Duke asked Cadogan if he recalled the incident, adding that he wished a battery to be thrown up on the spot, and had not desired at the moment to speak openly of his purpose. Cadogan replied that he had already given instructions for the erection of a battery. The Duke expressed his surprise that the gallant soldier had divined his intention. Cadogan thereupon exclaimed that he knew his chief to be too much a gentleman to ask him to pick up a glove without some hidden purpose, and he had guessed what the Duke meant. That incident reveals one secret of Marlborough's power—the confidence which he inspired

<sup>1</sup> "The Life and Actions of His Grace, John, Duke of Marlborough, with some Remarks on his Conduct," by an Old Officer in the Army; London, 1711.

in the men who served under him, from his favourite General down to the meanest trooper.

The Duchess, unlike the Duke, never won such implicit trust, and it was largely due to the fact that she did not possess, like him, the faculty of self-command, and was too emphatic and insistent about trifles. An accusation which had been made against her—by one of her own sex—is strictly true, and therefore ought in all candour to be cited: "In her excessive approval of her own openness, she came at last to the belief that self-restraint was treason to sincerity."<sup>1</sup> Marlborough has been accused of inordinate ambition. No one now believes the ridiculous charge which Swift made, that the real motive of the Duke in desiring the post of Captain-General for life was that he might be in a position, if need be, to seize the Crown. His own letters to the Duchess, written for her eye alone, remain at Blenheim to refute such an accusation, as well as to prove that Lord Macaulay did not know what he was writing about when he had the temerity to state that the Duke had so little education as to be unable to spell the most ordinary words in his own language. Marlborough had ambition, but it was not of the mean sort which his assailants have urged. It was the ambition of a man of action, supremely well versed in affairs, and of wide and alert political vision. Historians have stumbled one after another in the laboured attempt to prove that his ambition was chiefly personal, and at best only slightly patriotic. As a matter of fact, it was the other way. The Duke's ambition was to assert the authority of England in the councils of Europe, to vindicate the Common Cause of the Allies, to shatter the inordinate claims of France, to maintain the Protestant Succession, to bring the war

<sup>1</sup> "Famous Ladies of the English Court," by Mrs Aubrey Richardson; London, 1899, p. 342.

to a victorious conclusion, and then, and not till then, to rest on his laurels at Blenheim with the woman he loved. He succeeded in the majority of these high purposes, and, to his credit, he had nothing whatever to do with the weak and shameful terms of the Peace of Utrecht.

If this were more than a study of John, Duke, and Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, it would be easy to add to what has been written in vindication of the matchless soldier who combined the imagination of a Napoleon with the cool judgment of a Wellington.<sup>1</sup> Swift, a bitter and uneasy cleric at war with his own calling, who assuredly did not throw away ambition, charges Marlborough with inordinate desire for self-advancement. Pope, who, in spite of his courtly platitudes, was not a shining example of generosity either in deed or word, accuses him of avarice, yet he twice refused the Government of the Netherlands, though it carried with it the princely income of £60,000 a year,<sup>2</sup> and emptied his private purse after the Battle of Malplaquet in order to meet the crying necessities of wounded French officers.<sup>3</sup> Bolingbroke, who intrigued more deeply and more dishonourably than any other statesman of his age, seeks to fasten the charge of treason on the Duke. Harley, who, according to common testimony, cringed before Anne and flattered her to the top of her bent, had the audacity to assert that Marlborough condescended to the basest forms of adulation. Macaulay, who was notoriously prejudiced in his historical verdicts, and has in consequence been described, with perhaps an excess of candour, as the "arch-manipulator of truth," exhausted his rhetorical arts in order to show that Marlborough was a double-minded man, unstable

<sup>1</sup> "History of English Patriotism," by Esme Wingfield-Stratford; London, 1913; two vols., vol. i., p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> Alison, vol. i., p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 395.

in all his ways, and guilty, moreover, of a "hundred villainies."<sup>1</sup>

Here it may be as well to examine a little closely the accusations brought against Marlborough by Macaulay in his "History of England" with regard to the supposed betrayal of General Talmash, when that gallant soldier was in command of the expedition to Brest in 1694. If that was the worst of Marlborough's "hundred villainies"—and the historian expressly states that it was—the vague rhetorical charges of Macaulay, as well as his simulated moral indignation, break down hopelessly. This was conclusively proved as far back as 1859 by the late John Paget, a London stipendiary magistrate, accustomed to sift evidence, of dispassionate temper, and marked literary aptitudes. He published in *Blackwood's Magazine* for June in the above year a vindication of the Duke of Marlborough, which was afterwards republished, with other historical and judicial essays, in a volume entitled "Paradoxes and Puzzles."<sup>2</sup> Lord Macaulay was alive when Paget brought against him a charge of grave inaccuracy, but, so far as can be ascertained, he made no reply, and subsequent editions of his book retain without alteration the untrue and damaging statements which Paget, by an appeal to contemporary documents, unquestionably refuted. Macaulay imputes mean and ungenerous motives to Marlborough, about which he knew no more than any other modern man. If the question of motives is to take the place of direct historical evidence, there is no personage in the world's annals who might not be assailed in like fashion. Sir Leslie Stephen, who was by no means a eulogist of the Duke, states, in his article on Marlborough in the "Dictionary of National Biography," in speaking of the historian's method in this case, that "such

<sup>1</sup> "History of England," chap. xx., p. 489. <sup>2</sup> *Blackwood*, 1864.

insight into secret motives is only granted to men of Macaulay's omniscience."

There is no proof that Marlborough was jealous of Talmash; his whole record as a soldier is enough answer to such a charge, since it reveals that, whatever his faults were, he was incapable of despicable meanness of that kind. Oldmixon, who is the only authority whom Macaulay can cite, was, on his own showing, a writer of small credit. Macaulay, indeed, when it suits his purpose, dismisses Oldmixon with a left-handed compliment: "It is notorious that, of all our historians, he is the least trustworthy." And yet, in spite of the silence of more responsible writers, some of whom were only too eager to blacken Marlborough's character, Macaulay elaborates with malevolent art the unsupported statement of this obscure and forgotten scribe. But what was it that Macaulay alleged in his attempt to prove that Marlborough was "a prodigy of turpitude"?<sup>1</sup> Oldmixon states that Talmash, when he was carried to Plymouth mortally wounded, exclaimed: "I die contented, having done my duty in the service of a good Prince."

"He knew who were the traitors, and named them to a person who stood at his bedside, that he might discover them to Queen Mary in His Majesty's absence, that she might be upon her guard against those pernicious counsellors who had retarded the descent, and, by that means, given France time so to fortify Brest as to render all approaches to it impracticable."<sup>2</sup>

Macaulay states that the "real criminal" was Marlborough, and gives as his authority the Stuart Papers, which were first published, in two large volumes, by James Macpherson in 1775.<sup>3</sup> It is notorious that the exiled Court at St. Germain kept

<sup>1</sup> "History," vol. ii., p. 515.    <sup>2</sup> Oldmixon, "History," p. 392.

<sup>3</sup> "Original Papers containing the Secret History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of George I." (1775).

itself uncommonly well posted up, by means of secret emissaries, concerning all that was passing in England, alike in the reigns of William III. and of Anne. One of the spies who was sent by James was a certain Captain Floyd, and he was in London in active communication with some of the most prominent of the "pernicious counsellors," who at the moment stood high in the confidence of William. The "real criminal" who betrayed the secret of the expedition to Brest was one or the other of these statesmen, for Marlborough clearly was out of the running, since he was in disgrace with William, and was, in consequence of Mary's open hostility to his wife, about the last man to whom she would turn in an emergency. The actual "counsellors" with whom Floyd was in secret communication at that crisis were Shrewsbury, Russell, and Godolphin. These three men were in high and responsible posts of authority; they had the confidence of William, and were conversant with his military projects. Two of them directly, and one indirectly, assured Floyd in unmistakable terms of their allegiance to James and their desire to promote his interest. Godolphin was curiously outspoken. He told Floyd that Russell, who was Admiral of the Fleet as well as First Lord of the Admiralty, "would infallibly appear before Brest," and that this information afforded "a just pretext" to Louis to send troops to that place. This conversation took place somewhere about the middle of April, 1694, and it reached Versailles from St. Germain on the 1st of May. It is true that Floyd, when in England, saw Marlborough, but he was not in a position to make any disclosures, and as a matter of fact, beyond the usual protestations, he said nothing.

There is a letter in the "Shrewsbury Correspondence" <sup>1</sup> which shows conclusively that William III.

<sup>1</sup> Coxe, "Shrewsbury Correspondence," p. 45.

was perfectly aware, and therefore, presumably, Russell and Talmash as well, that the French were not likely to be taken by surprise at Brest. The letter is to Shrewsbury, and is dated the 18th of June, a fortnight after the disaster. In it the King expressly says that the French "were long apprised of our intended attack, and made active preparations for defence." That seems to show that any information which Floyd carried back merely justified the alarm which already existed at the French Court. What, then, was the head and front of Marlborough's offending—in other words, the point in the Stuart Papers upon which Macaulay fastens in his attempt to prove this "worst of his hundred villainies"? It is a letter which Marlborough wrote to James on the 4th of May, the day before the expedition actually sailed. He states that "only to-day I have learnt the news I now write to you," which shows that he could not have been the "real criminal" who betrayed a secret which was in the possession of Louis XIV. three or four days before Marlborough set pen to paper. When Marlborough wrote, the fact of the expedition was common property in England. He might almost be said to be only repeating coffee-house tattle of the hour. He certainly, therefore, stands clear of being the first to divulge William's plans directly to James, and therefore to Louis. It would have been more honourable if he had held his peace even then, but nearly every prominent man at that time was open to the charge of divided allegiance. Louis XIV. must have foreseen such an attack, even before Floyd's letter reached him on the 1st of May. This is borne out by a passage in Luttrell's "Diary":

"The French certainly knew of our design, having about 10,000 Foot and 4,000 Horse veteran soldiers encamped there ever since 22 April, and 10,000 militia

within the town. Vauban, the engineer, was also there, and fortified every pass."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, with such evidence open before him, Macaulay has the audacity to charge Marlborough with unparalleled treachery, and to denounce him as the murderer of Talmash. As for his reliance on the writer whom he found it convenient to his purpose to cite, it is enough, to borrow Macaulay's own words, though made in another connection: "Oldmixon's assertion, unsupported by evidence, is of no weight whatever."<sup>2</sup> The same remark applies to Macaulay's own unsupported assertions.

Thackeray, who apparently derived his historical information chiefly from Macaulay, with almost child-like credulity has not scrupled to depict in magic ink, with all the dangerous licence of the novelist, in the pages of "*Esmond*," a portrait of Marlborough which is as vivid as it is misleading.

One of the charges brought against the Duchess with parrot-like insistence is that of ingratitude to Queen Anne. It cannot be denied that she was furious when driven from the Court, and, as she was always herself, she cried aloud, and spared not, in a way that scandalized even the Duke. But it might surely be urged that the Queen was ungrateful to her, since through a long term of critical years, when the burden of the crown was heavy, the Duchess was set under authority, with all that that meant at such a Court. It is a common saying that distance lends enchantment to the view, and long before the close of her own life the Duchess sensibly modified her verdict of the Queen. Otherwise she would not have erected the statue at Blenheim to Her Majesty, which proclaimed in marble the indebtedness of the Churchills to Queen Anne. Another of the accusa-

<sup>1</sup> Luttrell, "*Diary*," vol. iii., p. 328 (June 14, 1694).

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, "*History*," vol. iii., chap. xi.



tions brought against Her Grace was that all the statements about her generosity to the Hill family contained in "The Conduct" rest entirely on her own declarations, which Macaulay, in a characteristic passage, broadly hints are not to be trusted, except when they afford evidence of her own malevolence or folly. Here again it is possible to repel, from documentary evidence at Blenheim, such insinuations. There exists among the archives a letter from old Mrs. Hill, Abigail's mother, alive with expressions of gratitude for the Countess of Marlborough's goodness to her children. She expresses her gratitude, not only because Lady Marlborough had "me in your most compassionate thoughts, but also my children, for whom is my greatest concern." She states further, in view, apparently, of some gift:

"I give my humble thanks for your kind token received in your letter. I confess I want words to express the thankful sense I have of your favour, but never a heart to pray the Almighty to multiply His choicest blessings upon you. I give my particular thankful acknowledgement that you are pleased to have such good intentions towards my daughter."<sup>1</sup>

It ends: "Madam, your most affectionate aunt and humble servant, Elizabeth Hill." There is another letter at Blenheim, which has never been published, which merits citation. It is from Abigail herself at a later stage, when she was Mrs. Masham, climbing by devious ways into favour with the Queen, and it contains the following significant admission:

"Falsehood and folly were never great strangers about courts, and yet Your Grace is so far happy that your greatest enemies never reproached you either with want of sense or sincerity."<sup>2</sup>

No attempt has been made in these pages to disguise the freaks and foibles of the Duchess. The

<sup>1</sup> Blenheim Papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

worst that can be urged against her, and on that point she cannot be defended, were her implacable resentments against two of her own children—Lady Godolphin and the Duchess of Montagu. But in all quarrels there are two sides, and they assuredly were cross-grained and undutiful daughters.

But what about the virtues of the Duchess? They have been ignored with a shrug of the shoulders as if they were negligible. But they were real and cannot be lightly dismissed. She held the reins of authority with strong, masterful, but clean hands. She was a capricious, exacting, but loving and devoted wife. The purity of her life was conspicuous in an age of licence. She had a high sense of public duty, and was not to be bribed when other gold keys than the one which she wore at her waist opened most doors. She had a patriotic love of England, insular perhaps, but none the less real. For those who were in her service her sympathy was open-handed and unparaded. She was endowed with practical capacity, and revealed it in small things as well as in great, and her allegiance to the claims of honour when she was in a responsible position is not open to challenge. She was almost inclined to forgive Swift all his bitter attacks because "*Gulliver's Travels*" was the surprise and delight of her old age. She wished the man had known the Duke and herself at closer quarters when their battle ran hard. "The brave old Duchess," as Thackeray described her, was kind, not in an emotional or sentimental, but in a practical and lavish way, especially to dependents, and she was superb in her devotion to the memory of the man who worshipped her. Fielding was right: Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough—when all that can be urged against her on the score of temper, ambition, and arrogance, is admitted—stands on the page of history as a brilliant figure, and was in truth, a "glorious woman."

This book opened with Sarah Jennings; it shall close with John Churchill, who loved her with an undivided heart. England to-day is not merely proud of the achievements, but can afford to be generous to the faults, of the man whom William III. on his death-bed, at the dawn of the eighteenth century, described as of "cool head and warm heart," when he advised the Princess about to succeed to the sceptre to entrust to Marlborough the destinies of the nation in the tremendous struggle which was then impending with the inordinate claims of France. The genius of the great soldier rose to the occasion. His resistless sword broke the power of Louis XIV., defended the United Provinces, saved the Empire of Leopold I., and raised England to supremacy in the councils of Europe.

Brief as the reign of Anne was, Marlborough made it illustrious. It is the magic of his name and the splendour of his services which lend to its annals their chief distinction. It requires a certain moral hardihood to attempt to pass judgment on another's motives. Actions lie open, but what determined them is concealed. Human nature is swayed to and fro when the "tide in the affairs of man" runs deep and swift. The point to determine is whether that which was noble and unselfish, or that which was less worthy, prevailed. The magnitude of Marlborough's shining achievements is not all that can be urged on his behalf. What turns the scale in his favour is his devotion to duty, the goodness of his heart, the patience and chivalry which were conspicuous in his life. If it be true that Marlborough is an instance of that "strange dualism in men which makes them partly good and partly bad, sometimes strong and sometimes weak,"<sup>1</sup> it can at least be claimed that the ruling motives of his life were

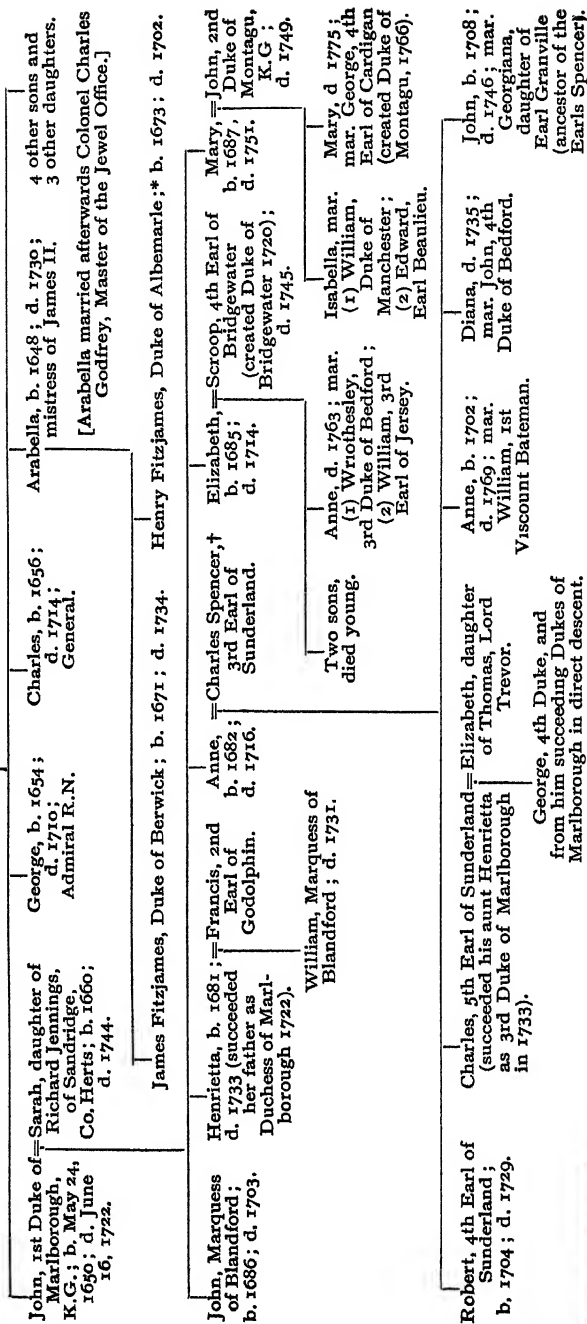
<sup>1</sup> "Miscellanies," by Viscount Morley; vol. iv., p. 187.

noble, even though there were moments when his conduct, like that of other men less highly placed, less greatly tempted, was open to question. He had his weaknesses; no attempt has been made in these pages to conceal them. He intrigued, like all the prominent statesmen of an age when there were rival claimants for the throne and no one could forecast what would happen in the realm. But the final and over-mastering impression which Marlborough leaves—apart from his ardent devotion to the Queen, and his far-reaching services to the Common Cause—is that of quiet, even-tempered, heroic strength—a strength which proved superior to the cruel strain of adverse fortune, no less than to the insidious pitfalls which lurk in the path of unrivalled triumph.

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# TABLE OF THE CHURCHILL FAMILY.

Sir Winston Churchill, b. *circa* 1620 ; d. 1688 = Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Drake, Bart., of Ashe, Devonshire.



\* Title created by James II. after the Revolution, and therefore never recognized in this country.

† Charles, 3rd Earl of Sunderland, was the grandson of Henry, 3rd Lord Spencer of Wormleighton, who was created Earl of Sunderland in 1643, and was killed at Newbury in the same year.





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